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Prologue

RockClan stalked silently through their rainy territory, heading toward StreamClan's camp as sneaky as a snake. The ground was soft and slushy. Newleaf was on it's way; it was a promise with the first rain in moons. Without a care in the world, their leader lead them on with a sharp glint in her eye and her muscles twitching with adrenaline.

RockClan halted only a few tail-lengths away from the camp they were planning to invade. The rain continued to pour on as the emotionless warriors sat in the hunters' crouch, waiting for a sign to move. Their leader only had to do a simple gesture with her tail tip to signal RockClan to surround StreamClan's campground.

With a cry over a flash of lightning, RockClan raided StreamClan's innocent camp.

As thunder crashed overhead, blood splattered the muddy snow with it's crimson liquid under the dark, stormy night sky. Yowls of fury, terror, and pain echoed through the air. Rain poured out of the sky *way* harder than a few heartbeats ago while the cats fought.

Each of the cats fought for what they believed was right. The world around them was dark and scary as their only light source was covered by thick, unwelcoming clouds.

Lark hurried into the camp as the battle continued mercilessly. With his glowing skull-protector, he watched the two Clans he came to grow fond of fight over nothing. RockClan had become nothing but greedy monsters, he realized with a shake of his head. As he stood at the entrance to StreamClan's camp, a RockClan warrior slashed a StreamClan warrior's jaw so had, their warm blood sprayed Lark's white dog skull. Lark held grudges until his time was up, but this grudge would linger around him even after death. Shaking his head from his disappointment and anger, he ran off into the night.

The Clans went on biting, slashing, and killing without noticing

Lark's appearance nor disappearance.

As cats dropped and bled, the sound of the infected cats, dogs, and Twolegs came from beyond the fences. Thunder boomed again and flashed it's bright purple and yellow lights, illuminating the world to reveal bloody and injured, stumbling creatures as they made their way toward the smell and sound of an easy target.

Tired and injured, RockClan realized how foolish their decision was to attack StreamClan. Their leader was so emotionless at that point that they still hadn't realized what was truly going on. The world was lit up once more as both Clans paused their selfish acts to try to stitch up their new problem.

The infected bags of rotting meat headed toward the scent of the injured through the shadows of the night with their jaws wide, ready for the kill.

Allegiances

RockClan:

Leader-

Silverstar; thin, silver she-cat with dark silver stripes, left blue eye and right green eye. Apprentice- Hollowpaw

Deputy-

Crowflight; grey and black tabby tom, amber eyes. Apprentice- Dreampaw

Guards-

Tigerstripe; (description below - night guard)

Sparkdust; (description below - day guard)

Medicine Cat-

Shadowflower; black pelt with white spots on her flank, small she-cat with very light blue eyes.

Warriors-

Stormcloud; grey tom with blue eyes, Crowflight's brother, Ripplecurrent's mate.

Tigerstripe; brown tabby tom with black stripes and one black paw, blue eyes, Blossomfrost's mate.

Sparkdust; brown tabby she-cat with white front paws, amber eyes.

Mistnose; grey-and-white she-cat with dark blue eyes.

Foxtuft; dark ginger she-cat with a fluffy tail and white tail tip, yellow eyes. Apprentice- Pebblepaw

Snowfern; grey with white patches and green eyes, she-cat. Apprentice- Lionpaw

Ripplecurrent; orange tabby with amber eyes, she-cat.

Jinx; black tortoiseshell she-cat with white-and-grey splotches, white paws, has cold green eyes and a missing brother named Swipe. Isn't fully in either Clan, is just hanging around both Clans.

Lark; black with grey markings and many scars, crystal blue eyes, tom. Isn't fully in either Clan, is just hanging around both Clans with Jinx.

Apprentices-

Dreampaw; pale grey she-cat with green eyes, Snowfern's daughter.

Lionpaw; fluffy orange tom with white paws, amber eyes.

Pebblepaw; grey with darker flecks, blue eyes, she-cat, Ripplecurrent's daughter as well as Lionpaw.

Hollowpaw; black-and-white tom with light blue eyes, Lionpaw and Pebblepaw's brother, Ripplecurrent's foster-son.

Queens-

Blossomfrost; light fluffy brown fur with white ears and tail tip, pale green eyes, **Darkkit**; dark grey tabby tom with bright blue eyes, **Lilykit**; light grey with darker legs, ears, and tail tip, purple eyes, **Deerkit**; fluffy brown tabby tom, large blue eyes.

Elders-

Currently None-

***

StreamClan:

Leader-

Wildstar; white calico she-cat with amber eyes.

Deputy-

Wolftail; large black and brown patched tom, hazel eyes, Chippaw's father, Blackwind's mate.

Guards-

Ghostglow; (description below - night guard)

Crescentmoon; (description below - day guard)

Medicine Cat-

Smoketail; grey tabby tom with a blue tint, dark blue eyes and barely noticeable scars.

Warriors-

Ghostglow; white tom with glowing yellow eyes.

Crescentmoon; black with blue eyes, she-cat. Apprentice- Chippaw

Amberthroat; small red-brown she-cat with darker stripes on her tail, amber eyes.

Whisperbreeze; silver tabby she-cat, amber eyes.

Thornfall; black tom, white underbelly, green eyes, Whisperbreeze's brother.

Apprentices-

Chippaw; brown tom with black ears.

Queens-

Blackwind; jet black, light green eyes, she-cat, Thornfall and Whisperbreeze's mother. Expecting.

Elders-

Dawnflower; long light ginger fur, black spots around her blue eyes, she-cat, Amberthroat's mother.

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Cats Outside the Clans:

Leaf; pale brown tabby tom with darker patches, long fangs, dark green eyes.

Adder; mottled, dark brown she-cat with a white underbelly, dark green eyes, Leaf's sister.

Chapter One

Ripplecurrent's POV

With the sound of little groans and grunts echoing throughout the nursery, I couldn't try to sleep any longer. I lifted my head off of my paws to check out what was going on. *I just woke up, could you be any louder?* I wanted to snap at Lionkit and Pebblekit when I found out they were the ones tumbling around and making all the noise.

Blossomfrost's litter had been part of the issue before, but I understood they didn't know any better. *But* these two *sure do!* I wanted to yell.

Sighing, I decided to be nice and keep my mouth shut.

I sat up and began cleaning my ruffled up fur. It's thick waves were stuck up and knotted in several places, annoying me even more.

It had been three moons since Shadowflower had come back, shaking with surprise, from her journey for catmint. The catmint, by the way, didn't do anything for my mate or the poor, weak soul of Fireflywing... Meaning her scary trip was, literally, all for nothing. Fireflywing's death wasn't entirely missed by any cat, really, other than her very effected sister. Mistnose was now - more - distant and cold than before.

It had been *three whole moons* of nothing but seemingly endless snow storms and empty bellies. The constant groan of my Clanmates made my heart twist with shame and sadness because I knew, in the end, my kits and I would always get the first, and sometimes even the *only*, prey. I acted careless though so no one would reassure me that "it was okay". I knew very well it was less than *okay*. I had done just fine without reassurance thus far, so why would I need their pitiful glances now?

Just as I got the last knot out, I noticed Hollowkit wasn't with his step-siblings. "Pebblekit, Lionkit," I got their attention, their tiny

heads glancing over at me. "Why isn't Hollowkit playing with you? He *is* your brother, after all!" They shrugged, uninterested, and turned away.

Rolling my eyes, I left the nursery. Dreampaw, like most mornings, was showing Hollowkit how to hunt and fight. *How didn't I know?* I purred to myself. The little black tom was a bit off balanced and a tad too loud, but he was doing well after three moons of "training". It brought them closer together, and I could practically already see their future together.

Sparkdust hurried out of the camp as Tigerstripe and Foxtuft came in. All three carried their own personal thick, sharpened stick to protect themselves and our territory. So far the sticks - ordered by Silverstar - had been helpful, the three had reported.

The sun was just making it's way up the dim sky. Small, white clouds blew across the grey sky, bringing wind into the clearing and ruffling up my fur the wrong way. A growl crept up my throat. *I* just *did-*

"Ripplecurrent, how was your sleep?" Stormcloud rasped, padding from the medicine den. He was lanky and patches of his thick, grey fur were missing from his pelt. I pitied him, wanting to help him all I could but the catmint was the only effective thing. Even *that* didn't seem to be doing much more then make him smell nice.

I touched noses with him. "It was great," I meowed. "Do you feel any better?"

He seemed to hesitate whether to be straight forward or to say what I wanted to hear. "Um, I'm not sure. I feel a bit more of myself... But it's hard to say, really." Stormcloud nuzzled me. Of course he wouldn't tell me straight up that nothing had changed. I lashed my tail and narrowed my eyes.

Crowflight came to stand in the center of the clearing to set up patrols as Shadowflower ordered my mate to go to the den before the chilly air killed him. After a sly nudge and a cute wink, he staggered away to the stuffy den.

"With leafbare coming to a hopeful end, I expect that fresh-kill pile to be full!" Silverstar warned. "Keep a sharp eye on StreamClan, too... Report *everything* while on patrol!"

Crowflight rolled his eyes behind his leaders back. I didn't blame him. Silverstar was a terrible leader. Power-crazy was a perfect word to describe her.

"Plus, I think it's time Ripplecurrent's litter became apprentices. They may be only almost five moons, but they are healthy and full of good spirits... We need apprentices and they seem just *perfect* for the role!" Silverstar announced, whisking her tail toward her.

My three kits hopped proudly toward their leader. *What?* I suddenly felt the urge to protect my litter as if I were a she-fox with her kits. I could sense the rest of the Clans shock, too.

Stormcloud went against Shadowflowers orders to stand beside me and watch our kits become apprentices. "They look horrible!" I gasped, licking their fur clean as best as I could before Silverstar began to glare at me with impatience.

"Pebblekit, step forward." My splotched daughter stepped forward as I backed away. "Though you are younger than most, you and your siblings show much loyalty and confidence. Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and fight for your Clan, even at the cost of your life?" She nodded eagerly, "I do!"

"Then from now until you become a warrior you will be known as Pebblepaw. I trust Foxtuft will show you the proper ways of the warrior code. This means Foxtuft is now just a warrior, no longer a guard."

This went on twice more, with Hollowpaw getting Silverstar as a mentor and Lionpaw getting Snowfern. Silverstar actually mentioned Snowfern had to start acting like a warrior, not a kittypet, or she would be thrown out of the Clan. No one dared to protest other than her loyal daughter. Dreampaw had to be held back by Tigerstripe so she wouldn't attack the leader.

"That's my mother you're talking to!" She had snapped. "If you think

I wouldn't throw you out with your mother, too, you're wrong," Our leader had replied.

What is this Clan coming to? I wondered, shaking my head.
***
With the shortage of warriors and having a night-guard, the entire Clan went to the Gathering silently. The moon was full and the stars were out, twinkling brightly. Of course, Stormcloud, Blossomfrost, her kits, and a camp-guard (Tigerstripe), were left behind.

I wasn't used to the long walk. It was my first time going to a Gathering since my pregnancy and litter. Now all four of us were going. Sadly, Stormcloud was sound asleep in the medicine den, unable to come due to his elevating temperature. My two kits and my foster-son were rushing ahead, ecstatic to go to their very first Gathering. *Too bad Stormcloud couldn't be here...* I sighed quietly as I trekked through the melting, wet snow. Silverstar, of course, was at the head of our Clan, with her chin high and eyes wide.

We padded along the shoreline. I noticed the lake was thinning, the small rocks no longer had ice between one another, and the air was just a touch less chilly. I could actually feel the frozen pebbles in between my toes this time, unlike the other times when I had gone out for short walks to the lake.

RockClan finally came to the steep hill we called our Gathering. Obviously StreamClan was already there; their calico leader was sitting up straight on a jagged boulder sticking out of the hill. Silverstar stalked up the hill, hopping onto the boulder to stand next to Wildstar. They bowed heads to each other. My three kits ran over to Thornpaw and Whisperpaw. I watched eagerly. I wondered if we could trust them and if they changed.

Smoketail hurried over to Shadowflower, who was later joined by Zinnia, Jinx and Lark met up with Crowflight, and Snowfern bumped into Dawnflower - who, to be honest, looked like she died two days ago. The elderly she-cat looked old, tired, and depressed.

I looked over to my three kits again. Chippaw had joined the crew, as well as Dreampaw. I overheard that Thornpaw was now Thornfall, Whisperpaw was now Whisperbreeze, and how mad

Chippaw was at his father for becoming mates with Blackwind. Apparently, she was expecting his kits. *No wonder she isn't here,* I thought.

Within heartbeats of me being quiet and observant of the Clans, the two leaders called us forward. The Clans didn't separate like they would back in our first territory. Instead they stayed put and gazed up at Silverstar and Wildstar. Ever since the infection the two Clans had gotten closer.

"I will go first," Silverstar decided, stepping over to the edge of the boulder.

"For RockClan, we have only grown stronger and more independent. I am leading my Clan well; this harsh leafbare was just a small test. We have three new apprentices as of today, and they are strengthening and becoming great fighters." Hollowpaw, Lionpaw, and Pebblepaw puffed out their chests as their eyes gleamed with pride. I purred. "The loss of Marshstar was hard and sudden, but we are managing greatly. RockClan has become a new and improved Clan after I became leader," the silver leader announced. I rolled my eyes.

I sensed someone sit beside me. Glancing over, I realized it was Ghostglow. He didn't look much better than Dawnflower, but at least he wasn't depressed looking or as *dead* looking. "Silverstar is quite the character, isn't she?" He purred. I nodded and kept my eyes on our leader. She finished her announcement and then Wildstar stepped forward.

"You have no idea," I replied.
***
There's chapter one everyone <3 Hope you enjoyed! Leave a vote and a comment if desired and have a great weekend!
P_A83 out!

Chapter Two

Chippaw's POV

StreamClan silently padded through the cool field, heading back to our new home from the Gathering. I barely remembered our old territory. The only things I could vividly remember was the wide, blue river, the long and loud waterfall, and the large territory of rocks above our camp.

The moon was up high, full and glowing brightly. The stars shone like shards of twinkling balls of ice above us. I trekked through the long grass, and in heartbeats I found myself stalking through it like a tiger stalking its prey. I could hear my father, Wolftail, chirping a story to Amberthroat from behind us. The quiet she-cat just let him talk instead of reply. Usually Dawnflower would be the one to spit out exaggerated stories, but of course Wolftail would be the one to out-talk her. I rolled my eyes.

Within heartbeats I had scurried in front of Wildstar. Anger boiled inside of me. Blackwind and Wolftail? Did he not care about my mother at all? It was bad enough that he was mates with the ugly she-cat, but to get her pregnant? *Now I'll be stuck with* more *annoying step-siblings!* I thought with a growl.

As I headed toward camp alone, I heard something stumbling through the frosty grass. My heartbeat sped up. *Is it Ghostglow?* I hoped, but I didn't dare stand up. My gut told me not to move a muscle. StreamClan was far behind, I realized, as I turned to find no one there.

A small moan escaped the strangers lips as it neared me. I gasped loudly, backing away quickly. I caused dirt to spray as I tore the ground up out of desperation to get away.

The growls became more intense as the infected cat noticed me. Squealing, I rushed away. It followed me quicker than any infected cat or dog had ever that I had seen. "Chippaw! Lour it this way!"

Ghostglow yowled. I glanced over my shoulder to search for it, but instead I found myself nose-to-nose with the glossy eyed cat.

My breath caught in my throat as I tripped over my own paws. With a loud *thump*, I hit the ground; I heard Ghostglow curse. The infected cat didn't think twice as it staggered over me and opened it's rotten mouth to bite me. With my belly up and my paws on it's sticky chest, I turned my head away from it as it snapped it's jaws in my face. It's breath made me gag, it's hollow eyes me carried me mentally, and it's rotten skin oozed onto my paws.

It let out a terrifying screech, spit flying onto my face. It practically busted my eardrums. That scream was like no other. I kicked at it's lower belly but the larger cat barely budged. I was half the size of a normal cat, so as much as I wouldn't ever admit it, I was no match for the moving-carcass.

Suddenly the cat went limp as a spear jabbed straight through the eye of the infected cat. Blood dripped onto my face. My stomach twisted horribly. Ghostglow threw the cat to the ground with a groan. The stick slid out of it's skull as simply as ever. Blood and brains sprayed out of the wound.

I stood up and felt my stomach twist and turn. "Ugh!" I hissed as I threw up my last meal. Ghostglow purred and hurried to meet up with Wildstar. Wolftail rushed to my side. "Are you okay? Are you bit?" He gasped, sniffing my pelt.

I shook him off and fluffed out my chilled pelt. "No, I'm fine. I just got his spit on me, that's all," I reassured him, hurrying away.

Hot with embarrassment, I hurried off with my father at my side until I got to my den. The whole time we traveled together, he made sure I knew not to walk alone next time, though I knew very well I would still travel alone.
***
As soon as I woke up, I tried to hurry out of the camp to the lake. "After last night, Chippaw, I think you should bring someone with you..." Blackwind suggested kindly, her eyes filled with concern.

Wolftail glared over at me from the fresh-kill pile. "Did you hear

something?" I meowed, looking over at Crescentmoon who was just leaving for her guard-duty. She glanced around and flicked her tail toward herself, "Uh, me?" I narrowed my eyes in confusion. "No? I think I'm beginning to go crazy! I'm starting to hear annoying voices..." I sighed, shaking my head. I kept on walking.

"Chippaw! Don't be so rude!" Wolftail scolded, his ears flat to his head. He rushed to catch up with me angrily.

As I headed out of the camp, I overheard him apologize for me. A rebellious spark shot through my chest as I called over my shoulder, "I wasn't sorry!"

Wildstar seemed to think it was funny because her whiskers twitched with amusement as I passed by her. "It's not *funny*." Wolftail sneered, glaring at the humoured leader.

I also passed by a lonely, overweight Amberthroat. The poor she-cat hadn't talked to anyone in the past moon. Something was bugging her, but no one knew what it was. Her eyes were wide and hollow, seeing but not seeing. Swallowing, I slinked out of camp.

The yellowed grass patches were frosted at the tip with frozen dew. The fur along my spine stood up as the dead, cold grass brushed against my paws and chilling my pads. With a bright blue tint to the awakening sky, the sky was free of clouds, and the sun making its way slowly up the horizon. I quickened my pace without realizing. With the lake coming closer, I fluffed out my fur. There was barely any ice on the lake now, just thin patches of glassy ice dotted here and there.

Without even thinking it through, I ran to the shore and jumped in. My head went under as well as the rest of my body, sending several shivers up my spine. The cold forced out a scream. Trapped bubbles wiggled up the the surface of the water. Everything underwater was blurry but I could still make out a dark figure underwater. The light filtered through the surface, making the body practically glow. My lungs screamed for air, but my body stayed under. The figure stayed still. Only when two bright green dots appeared did I swim to the surface. My heart ached suddenly, but I ignored it as best as I could.

Shaking out my pelt, I closed my eyes. *What was that?* I wondered. The chilly air threatened to freeze my wet fur, but I didn't care. I licked my pelt clean and padded off.

The dark figure haunted me as I hurried away. Deciding to go for a short walk, I walked away from RockClan's territory, more toward the Gathering Place, in search of something to take my mind off of the creepy figure. *Just my luck, it would have been another infected cat or dog.* I purred to myself, shaking my head.

I passed the Gathering Place without even noticing. Just as I began to come close to the edge of our territory, I got a whiff of Twolegs. Not only did I *smell* them, but I *heard* them, too. *Is my head playing tricks on me again...?* I thought, stalking toward the sounds and smells. Instead of moaning and groaning, they were speaking in their own language. It was strange. *I thought those stupid Twolegs would have all died by now...*

I ducked down when I seen the three Twolegs huddled by a small fire. Even with oddly colored ragged, dirty pelts and scratched faces, they still had smiles on their faces as the communicated together. *They don't seem harmless...* I thought. But as I gazed around their things, I noticed they had thick, black sticks beside their legs.

My ear twitched. I stood there, crouched down, as I watched the Twolegs mingle. I zoned out, and before I knew it, I found my legs cramping up and my neck stinging. I stood up as I decided to go back to camp.
***
My paws ached as I padded back towards camp. A sudden screech pierced the air, making my ears flatten to my skull and my fur jump off my body. A shiver ran down my spine as I rushed to get into the camp.

Cats were rushing to the medicine den when I entered. Looks of confusion matched mine as I pushed my way through to satisfy my curiosity, but before I even got near the entrance, Dawnflower pushed us back. "She's okay everyone! Amberthroat is giving birth..." The ragged mother confirmed, then muttered more to herself, "Out of no where..." Her eyes grew shady with confusion.

Gasps rung around the camp. *Amberthroat was pregnant all this time? But who's the father?* I wondered, gazing around the camp.

Cats began to whisper about who the father might be. Some assumed a rogue, some thought maybe it was a RockClan cat, but no one was sure. Only Amberthroat knew, but we all knew the stressed young she-cat would never tell.

Chapter Three

Crowflight's POV

Just as my dreams were becoming more vivid, I was woken up by a small prod in my side. I groaned and twitched my tail over my nose. Whoever it was that was touching me didn't give up, though. "Crowflight, get up! We need to go out." An unknown soft growl came from in front of my face. I blinked open my eyes. A set of wide, blue eyes were right in front of my face. I gasped and rolled out of my nest. Silverstar stood up straight.

"You know," I started, groggily sitting up, "you should have just kept *nudging* me instead of getting in my face." Silverstar shrugged. With my pelt sticking up everywhere, I stalked out of the den with RockClan's leader right behind me. She seemed to be stuck in her own world at that moment. "Whatever, but we have to go. I have an idea." She meowed once we got out of the warriors' den. I rolled my eyes and silently sighed. *More ideas?* I wondered, glancing over at the silver she-cat as she lead the way out of camp.

As soon as she got out of the camp, she picked up a coiled, silver wire. It had spikes jabbing out dangerously every few tail-lengths. My heart skipped a beat out of fear. *What in SoulClan's name is she going to do with that?* I wondered, flicking my tail.

The moon was half way down the sky, but the galaxy above was still navy blue. The stars were hidden by misty clouds that softly cascaded down the sky. Few SoulClan cats were out that night. My eyes felt heavy as I struggled to keep them open, but as we padded out of our territory, the more I woke up thanks to the cool, newleaf air. The ground was wet and mushy, sinking in between my toes.

I turned to the small she-cat. "So, what's your idea?"

With a twisted smirk, she gave me a side glance. "We are going to capture an infected cat, then we will tie it to a tree where we battle train..." She trailed off then looked me dead in the eye. "Do you see

where I am going with this?" I nodded wearily. I stopped looking her in the eye because of a slice in her lip from the wire. Blood beaded up at the wound as we kept padding on, then rolled down her jaw, and dripped onto the ground every few paw-steps. It was a deep cut that would have to be treated as soon as she entered camp, I guessed.

By the time I stopped looking at her mouth, the sound of growling floated over to us. We were at the field. The long grass waved in the breeze, whispering silently to us.

"Are you crazy?" I asked, astonished that we were actually doing it. Silverstar's ear twitched, but she kept her gaze forward as she took a step over the lowest board of the fence. "What if it gets loose? What if it actually gets to an apprentice?"

She paused. It took Silverstar a few heartbeats to look at me, but she eventually did. My heart was beating as fast as a rabbit could run. "We kill it and if the apprentice can't fight it off then they could never live and protect our Clan anyway." She simply answered, bowing her head to me as she went into the field. *Touche.* I thought, giving myself a small nod.

I hurried to catch up with Silverstar. She paused and waited for me to come in beside her. Dropping the wire, she nodded towards it. I looked at her, then to the wire, then back at her. She blinked at me, but that was all.

"You want *me* to get it? You want *me* to complete the idea *you* made up? I don't even agree with this, yet you're actually asking me to fetch a flesh-eating, stink-bag for you?" I shook my head, narrowing my eyes at her.

Silverstar stayed silent for a few heartbeats. Then she hissed very low, "You are my deputy, I am your leader, and you will obey my commands, Crowflight." Anger boiled in my veins as I snatched the wire.

Curse you, Marshstar, for choosing this insane she-cat as our leader! I snarled in my head. Two infected cats came towards me, moaning and drooling blood, from a dead dog's mauled carcass. I felt sudden

rage, and it threatened to burst as I hurried to the first infected cat. With a hefty kick, I sent the first cat - a cream-colored one - to the ground easily. It let out a twisted yowl. The other one, an amateur ginger maine coon, stumbled over on three good legs. It back leg seemed to be broken, snapped at the knee like a thin twig, it's useless broken limb dangling at the joint.

I twisted the wire around the neck of the cream cat then went over to the other one. At the perfect moment, I used my back leg to swiftly kick the front legs of the cat. They both easily snapped and to my relief, the cat hit the ground face first. It continued to moan with it's face in the grass.

It tried to scoot itself toward me with open, dirty jaws, but I easily padded away. The cream cat was up now, staggering on twisted legs. I dashed in behind it, grabbed the wire, and began to drag it toward my precious, awaiting leader. She dipped her head to me in approval and started to pad off. I followed with a sour face.

Within what seemed to be seasons upon seasons, we made it to the battle area. My neck and legs were beginning to fail me from the loud, wriggling infected cat as it struggled to get free. It made odd groaning noises as the wire tore at it's throat.

"Tie it to a tree, I don't care which one." Silverstar demanded.

I wanted to snap at her but I bit my tongue. Huffing and puffing, I dragged the annoying cat to the nearest tree and wrapped the free wire around it. It was a small, yet durable, pine tree. Melting snow layered it's branches.

I padded around the tree, keeping my distance away from the snapping cream-colored cat. With spit flying, it snapped at me. It kept trying to claw free from the wire as if it was stuck under a tree. It's growl was twisted as the wire choked it and tore the rotting skin open. Blood didn't pour out like it would on a live cat or dog or anything alive, instead it just oozed puss and other strange liquids.

Silverstar's rough meow broke my concentration. "Alright, let's go back,"

Out of respect, I kept my mouth shut again and followed the silver leader. Neither of us spoke to each other on the way back, but I didn't mind. Everything that came out of that she-cats sour mouth was rude and self-centered anyway.

By the time we hopped up onto the camps' rocks the sun was making its way over the tree tops across the lake. As soon as we entered camp, worried warriors hurried to speak to Silverstar and I. "We started hearing a roaming infected cat or dog, should we go out and find it? What if Tigerstripe is injured?" Snowfern's eyes were filled with great concern. Foxtuft and Pebblepaw stood in beside her, also concerned. Blossomfrost sat angrily by the nursery, her tail twitching.

"It is only the infected cat Crowflight caught. We will be using it as a practice-cat for the apprentices..." Silverstar reassured them, her eyes narrowed.

"What? That's so dangerous! What if it gets loose?" Foxtuft scoffed, her ears flat to her ginger head. Silverstar's tail lashed from all of the disapproval. A few more cats bombarded her with questions over and over until the stressed and embarrassed leader blew. "It doesn't matter!" She snapped, quieting the Clan instantly, "I am your leader and my word is your hope. What I say, is what you do!" Shocked glances peered back at her. A few of them looked at me, but I had nothing to say.

My stomach growled and my muscles screamed, but my day had only just started.

Chapter Four

Amberthroat's POV

The wind howled and my fur swayed in the breeze. Chills waved down my spine as the cool wind touched my warm pelt. The sky was no where to be seen, covered by dark, roaming clouds. I swallowed nervously as I fought to take a hasty step in front of me. I wasn't sure what was forward, backward, nor sideways; everything seemed to be the same.

"Die, die, die..." They whispered. "Die, die, die."

A fluttering sensation developed in my stomach and my heart began to race. A pair of glowing dots appeared in front of me. Without thinking, I moved toward it, but it didn't seem to get any closer. I swallowed again, my paws trembling. Another pair lightened, and then another. Soon I was being watched by many unknown pairs of eyes.

The eyes seemed to be chanting, "Die, die, die..." They got louder and louder. A sudden scratch on my flank made me spin around. Blood beaded up and threatened to spill from the wound. I didn't have time to focus on it anymore than a heartbeat because another scratch made me jump around. The scratches soon became gashes, and I soon was crying out in pain and confusion.

I tried to call out for someone to help me but my throat was so dry and swelled, I couldn't do anything more than yelp.

My throat seemed to close off and my breath came out in short rasps. The world around me spun, but I was standing still. Just as I began to feel like I was about to collapse, a tall, white figure stood in front of me. I gazed up slowly and swallowed nothing but tongue.

"Hello there," Whitefeather purred evilly, his eyes nothing but

empty dark hollow sockets.
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I jolted awake, panting and heart speeding. At my stomach were three tiny bundles of fur. All three were nameless. I didn't even want them, but since everyone already knew about their birth, I would be judged endlessly if I killed them or let them wander off.

My ear twitched and my eyes felt heavy. For roughly two moons I hadn't gotten a decent amount of sleep, and with a litter of newborns I knew I wouldn't be getting anymore sleep than I already did. I was exhausted with living. I felt as if I mattered to no one. Sighing, I carefully rose from the nest in the nursery and sat beside it.

The fluffy golden she-kit rolled over, her paw hitting her only brother - a white tom with a grey muzzle and front legs - on the head. The red-brown she-kit lay curled up in a ball, her back lightly touching her brothers.

I stared at the three kits wide-eyed. It was so shocking, so odd, so not me to have these kits at my paws. They were mine, and it didn't seem right. *Morningkit will be the golden one, Cherrykit will be the red-brown one, and the white one...* I narrowed my eyes at the tom. *Bonekit.*

Kill him! He's going to grow up to be just like Whitefeather! Kill him before it's too late!

I shook my head. Not now. *Do it... Do it...* I swallowed, then realized how thirsty I *really* was. Blinking, I stood up carefully and left the three kits in the nest. The moon was still up high, illuminating the lake that was so close to our camp. I could hear the infected roaming around, moaning and groaning. It was heart wrenching.

No one even cared that Rowantail was still missing, but why would they? They didn't even care that she was going insane in the first place... Anger boiled deep in my stomach, but I knew my anger was just around to mask my sadness, regret, and confusion.

I padded out of the camp and towards the still lake. There were no wind, no clouds, nothing but the moon and it's twin on the surface

of the dark waters. Lowering my head, I lapped at the cool water until I was satisfied.

A sigh escaped my lips and then I padded into camp again.

When I ducked into the nursery I almost jumped out of my pelt at the sight of Dawnflower's scrawny self standing over my kits. She turned around once she realized I was there. "Where did you go? You can't leave your kits unattended, Amberthroat," My mother advised, her eyes narrowed.

I nodded, pretending to listen. *They don't matter to me. I don't want them.* I wanted to say, but I knew it was immature to say so I kept my mouth firmly shut.

"You didn't tell me - or anyone for that matter - what their names were, by the way." Dawnflower meowed, sitting down by the nest. I sat beside her and gazed down at the three tiny bundles as they slept peacefully. I could feel Dawnflower's eyes piercing into the side of my head as I studied my kits. "I decided Cherrykit, Morningkit, and Bonekit," I replied after a few heartbeats of silence. My mother's eyes lit up and bowed her head in approval. "Beautiful choices..." She murmured. For some reason, I could tell she had something on her mind that she wanted to ask.

I looked over at her slowly, then without even having to ask what she wanted to say, she spoke. "Who's the father?" Dawnflower whispered. Dawnflower tried to look me in the eye, but I kept refusing. A pang in my heart formed and my stomach twisted and churned. I kept silent. Even if I wanted to say it, I wasn't sure I would be able to let it roll of my tongue.

I just want to forget... but with these kits I am constantly reminded of him. Especially... especially Bonekit... I shivered. *Maybe it's for the best? Maybe I should just get rid of him?*

"Amberthroat." Dawnflower demanded, her voice deep and serious. I blinked away my thoughts.

I began to grow angry and I didn't know why. "Who do you think, Dawnflower? Who else would it have been?" I kept my gaze down

at the kits. Bonekit squirmed and kicked his sister, Morningkit. She moaned but didn't wake. My ear twitched.

Dawnflower rested her tail on my shoulders and then touched my ear with her nose. "I'm here for you. I will help you with these kits and they will be the best warriors ever," She promised with a worried smile. I didn't reply, only let her leave the nursery.

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A/N:

Sorry for slow updates guys, life has been a struggle lately. I hope all is well, have a good Christmas break!

P_A83 out

Chapter Five

Pebblepaw's POV

Almost the entire Clan was out. It was a busy day filled with training and hunting. Lionpaw was bouncing around his new mentor, Snowfern, who seemed to be nothing other than nervous. Hollowpaw walked proudly beside an exhausted looking Silverstar with his chin raised and his tail straight up. Meanwhile, Foxtuft and I were padding beside each other, silent.

Silverstar lead the way, her shoulders hunched and fur matted. She didn't seem to be a fit leader, but I looked up to her nonetheless. *Silverstar is probably just stressed with her new duties!* I thought kindly.

I could barely consider it morning because the sun had yet to break the surface of the horizon. The sky was lightening up, but when you looked directly up to the sky it was still dark blue. A cool breeze blew through the patrol, sending shivers down my spine. At the sound of struggling growls easing closer with every step, my instincts told me to bolt though I knew I would be safe no matter what.

My ears flattened to my skull and my fur stood on end once my eyes caught the horrifying scene of an infected cat tied to a tree. I guessed that the clearing with the infected cat was the battle training area. I swallowed nervously as I stood beside my mentor.

"This cat here is our dummy. It is safely tied to this tree, meaning you will be safe from it's jaws unless you don't know what you're doing when you get close to it," Silverstar explained calmly. I glanced over at my thick furred brother, his claws scratching into the mud eagerly. Hollowpaw sat completely still except for his tail that flinched every so often.

The infected cat reached for Silverstar with open jaws but when the

extra silver wire came to an end, the cat jolted back harshly. Amazingly, the cat didn't yelp with pain, it wasn't even trying to get loose. "Hollowpaw, since you are my apprentice, you will be their example." It was obvious to me that my brother was nervous, but he hid it well by not hesitating when our leader spoke to him.

"First, we will do basic training with your mentors, then we will use the dummy. The noises of the infected cat could cause you anxiety, but with time, you will grow use to it," Silverstar lowered herself to the ground, one side to the infected cat and her opposite side to us apprentices and our mentors. "Do what I do, Hollowpaw," She instructed. Silverstar lowered herself so far that her chest was just barely above the ground.

Hollowpaw lowered himself with his eyes narrowed from deep concentration. Silverstar's tail was just above the ground, low and curled, while Hollowpaw's was straight out and trembling.

Snowfern glanced both ways and then hurried over to assist Hollowpaw. "Relax your tail so it doesn't cramp up or stick out like a sore toe," She murmured in his ear. Then she pushed softly down on his rump, "And keep your lower back down or you'll be spotted."

Silverstar seemed to be annoyed, but she watched the she-cat sit back down reluctantly and nodded in approval. "That's a good tip, Snowfern. Thank you," She meowed. Snowfern nodded and gazed up shyly as if she wasn't sure what she should say.

The silver leader stood up and advised that the apprentice stayed still. "We will test you to see how long you can stay in that position as quietly as possible. Anything infected senses you by our smell and the noise we make. If it hasn't noticed you, being silent and still is the best thing to do." I watched Hollowpaw gulp.

I scratched my claws into the ground impatiently. "I want all of the apprentices to try this for as long as you can." Silverstar demanded, and we all obeyed, following Hollowpaw's posture and then being corrected by our mentors. After being situated, the only thing that you could hear was the infected cats loud moans.

"Close your eyes, let the desperate growls sink into your weak,

innocent brains." I did as I was told. My heart sped up, my ears twisted and turned in alarm, and I fought to keep my tail still. I swallowed. The infected cats growls were deathly intense and I got a strange sensation that I was just out of it's reach. I slowly began to picture it's bloody jaws wrapping around my small neck as I screamed for help. Tightening my grip on the ground, I began to grind my teeth.

Panic set in as an instinct. My brain screamed for me to run, even though I knew I was safe. Several heartbeats went by and then Silverstar finally called it off. My eyes instantly opened and I backed away out of fear. I didn't even realize it, but I was holding my breath.

My siblings seemed to be just as frightened as well, their fur on end and their eyes wide. I felt pity for them, and I could sense our mentors did, too, except for Silverstar. "Now, you're all going to practice some basic fighting techniques..."

***

As I panted softly, Silverstar ordered the basic training to end. I had a small scratch on my cheek now - which made a spark of dignity flash in my heart - from Lionpaw mistakenly unsheathing his claws on me. Ripplecurrent would be furious, but it was all in good favor.

With our mentors beside us, all except for Hollowpaw, we sat in a line. I just so happened to be the first on the right side. Silverstar met eyes with me. My heart fluttered with fear.

"Pebblepaw, I want you to go first." Silverstar ordered. *First for what?* I began to panic as I stood up to follow her instructions. As if she had read my mind, she answered my question, "You will be the first to fight the dummy and show your brothers what to do,"

I nodded nervously and padded up slowly to face the raging infected cat. "You got this, Pebblepaw, he may look scary but the wire holds him back just fine!" Foxtuft called.

It's wide, milky, bloodshot eyes were bulging out of it's skull as it tried with everything it had to reach me. The wire tore at its throat,

a deep slit around the front of its neck. I gulped. It's paws no longer had fur on them from tearing at the ground, instead they were raw to the bone. It's growls were deep and tight, it's jaws dripped pink drool, and it's fur was falling off in clumps as it's body continued to decay. It's remaining fur was so stained you could barely tell it was once a cream-colored cat.

A large, swelled, glistening bite mark on it's left thigh showed it's fate, and a missing ear thickened it's fierceness.

Shivers ran down my spine. "*Pebblepaw,*" Silverstar growled from behind me, her teeth clearly clenched. I jolted slightly and shook my head, then narrowed my eyes and lowered myself.

Using the basic training I had just learned, I unsheathed my claws jumped forward. As I leaped in front of it, I slashed it in the face just in time to jump back before it even had the slightest chance to grab me. It snapped it's jaws dangerously close to my face, but nonetheless, my confidence boosted. My heart sped up from adrenaline as I continued to beat at it's face.

"Try to confuse it." Silverstar recommended. From the infected cat's loud growls, I didn't quite hear her, so I backed away and turned around. "Wh-" I began, but before I could finish my question, my brain clicked that something was wrong. Immense pain pulsed through the left side of my neck and I let out a heart-wrenching screech.

I heard my siblings and our mentors gasp once they realized what was happening. I tried to shake loose from it's death grip, but it only bit down harder. Without even thinking, I whipped around and started to throw blind strikes. I felt another pair of teeth wrap around my scruff, and out of shock, I tried to fight them, too.

My vision went blurry from surprise and distress. The second pair of teeth yanked on me, breaking the skin. Another scream pierced the air as I felt every rip and tear in my neck. I could hear my muscle and skin trying to resist the battle between one pair of teeth versus the other.

Eyes as wide as moons, heart speeding like a rabbit fleeing, and

jaws open wide, I didn't even notice when Snowfern and Lionpaw began to attack the dummy nor when I hit the ground. The infected cat gobbled the chunk of my neck in heartbeats, and it only wanted more. "You'll be okay, Pebblepaw, we're immune!" Hollowpaw reassured me. "Silverstar is going to get Shadowflower and Zinnia. Stay calm, you're fine... you're okay..." Foxtuft whispered. I looked out past them, past the bright sky, past SoulClan, and beyond.

As my thick blood poured out of my wound, I felt my legs go numb and the world spin. A puddle of blood formed around my face and shoulders, it's warmth the only thing I could feel. It smelled metallic.

I clutched onto the ground and gasped for air. "Hold on, Pebblepaw," Snowfern pressed large amounts of dead grass and frost-bitten leaves onto my wound. I didn't even feel it. I looked deep into her eyes as she did it, until all went black, and all went eerie.

Chapter Six

Shadowflower's POV

With a bundle of sweet-smelling herbs tickling my nose, I trotted through the wet grass towards camp. The birds sung above in the blooming treetops and the sky was as blue as a robins egg. It was magnificent out that day, so wonderful one might forget that the world was coming to a slow and painful end.

A sudden screech pierced the air, making me pause mid-step. My eyes widened and I strained to listen to the wilderness after the scream faded away. *That was too familiar to shrug off,* I thought with a speeding heart. I picked up my pace, hurrying back to camp to see if everything was alright.

Turns out everyone in camp was just as confused and concerned as I was. "Did you hear the scream, too?" I asked Blossomfrost and Tigerstripe as they sat together, sharing tongues. Their kits were tumbling around, making growling noises as they fought each other.

The two tabby cats nodded. The both of them seemed stressed and overly tired.

Stormcloud's weezing could be heard from across the clearing, but he seemed determined to get some fresh air. I wasn't so convinced that he should be up and about, but he was old enough to know what he should and shouldn't do.

I passed by the two mates and hopped down off of the rock to get into my den. I dropped the herbs by the stashes of other delicate herbs and then backed out.

Once I got back onto the main part of our camp, I noticed Zinnia was just hopping up onto the camp's large flat boulders as well. I dipped my head to her, and then she returned it.

"What's all the screaming about?" She purred. Her eyes were bright with joy even though the scream clearly bothered her.

"I was hoping you knew, actually," She shook her head and then hurried over to Stormcloud. Another scream silenced my Clanmates. The birds above instantly took off out of fright.

Suddenly, Silverstar leaped heroically onto the boulders from the opposite side of the entrance and yelled for Zinnia and I. She slid dramatically on the rocks before bolting back out of the camp after knowing we were on our way.

Zinnia and I exchanged nervous glances and then hurried to grab the most needed herbs for anything. We then dashed out after RockClan's rushed leader. I could feel the hot stares of my Clanmates as they watched us leave.

There was complete silence as the small Bengal she-cat ran beside me, dodging the branches and the thin trees that were scattered here and there. The silence made my nerves spike and my tail fluff up.

Silverstar was waiting at the opening to a clearing. It was clear now. The infected cat got ahold of someone. Zinnia shoved by the silver she-cat and anyone else in her way. The infected cat was still tied to the tree, but it seemed to be tied closer than before.

On the ground lay a completely still Pebblepaw. Her eyes were milky, her throat torn open, and her mouth open just enough to let her blood drip out from in between her stained teeth. I slowly padded over, my heart twisting. *We were doing so well...* I though, shaking my head.

I let the herbs drop to the ground as well as my head.
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"The loss of Pebblepaw was very sudden and heart wrenching, but we cannot grieve for long. We may miss her, but we have other things that we should be worrying about," Silverstar announced. I shook my head. Ripplecurrent - along with Lionpaw and Hollowpaw - were fuming with rage. Stormcloud was in the medicine den, sobbing alone.

The spotted apprentice lay in the center of the clearing, stiff and small. Rosemary was rubbed onto her silky pelt to keep the smell of death from reeking the camp.

No one seemed to agree with our leader, but no one challenged her. Not even Ripplecurrent, who is known for being sarcastic to anyone and everyone. "It's a shame that she couldn't do what was asked... Maybe she would still be here right now instead of me wasting our time to make this announcement... but the past is in the past and we need to move on right away." I could tell she was putting all of the blame on the young apprentice, but everyone knew it was her fault for bringing the infected cat into the territory in the first place.

Silverstar finished her announcement and hopped off of her den. Everyone crowded around Ripplecurrent and her kits, apologizing for her loss and comforting her. Through her remorse and agony, she showed a blank face and only nodded to every cat that spoke to her. She wrapped her fluffy orange tail protectively around her two sobbing kits.

After the warriors that had comforted Ripplecurrent began to go their separate ways, I hurried up to the grieving mother. "She's in a better place now," I murmured to Lionpaw and Hollowpaw. Neither of them acknowledged me but I didn't take offense to it. I glanced up at the orange she-cat and touched her shoulders briefly then murmured, "Silverstar is self-centered and disrespectful. Don't let her bother you," and then I walked away.

Just as I headed to my den to comfort Stormcloud, Lark and Jinx hurried into the camp. With frightened expressions clear on their faces, they asked everyone in general what was going on. Foxtuft quickly explained, making it clear that it was Silverstar's fault. Their scared expressions quickly changed to disgust.

Silverstar simply ignored the incident and out of the blue asked if the two of them would be entering the Clan. "You're both welcome to join RockClan, but if you say no then you must leave my territory and never come back."

Lark and Jinx exchanged glances and then Lark spoke, "You think after bringing an infected cat into your territory and then blaming

the death of a young, ignorant apprentice on herself that we will just join your Clan? The answer is no."

Jinx nodded in agreement. "In my opinion, I don't know what Marshstar was thinking when he chose you as deputy,"

Silverstar glared at the two rogues; she looked more offended than anything. "Fine, then get out of my territory and don't look back." She smirked and padded away.

RockClan was furious.

"After all Lark has done for us and StreamClan, you're just going to force them away?" Snowfern growled.

"If it wasn't for Lark, we would all be dead, and you know it!" Dreampaw snapped, but the leader ignored them all. More warriors spat out retorts and such, trying to offend and change Silverstar's mind, but she simply shrugged it all off.

"We will be going then," Lark announced, and then he turned to Crowflight and I. "If you ever need us, we will still be around." We both nodded.

"What about you, Zinnia? Will you join our Clan?" Silverstar asked from the top of her den.

She shook her head without hesitation. "Not a chance," she giggled, "but I will always be around outside of the Clans. Expect me to come check in anytime, too!" And then she, too, hurried out of our Clan to her real home.

Our Clan went completely silent. The same buzzing noise that haunted me every night came around again, and the longer the silence in the camp dragged on, the louder and more intense it got. I squeezed my eyes shut and clenched my jaw. I continued to sit there like that until Crowflight finally said we needed to bury the small apprentice before she came back.

Allegiances #2

RockClan:

Leader-

Silverstar; thin, silver she-cat with dark silver stripes, left blue eye and right green eye. Apprentice- Hollowpaw

Deputy-

Crowflight; grey and black tabby tom, amber eyes. Apprentice- Dreampaw

Guards-

Tigerstripe; (description below - night guard)

Sparkdust; (description below - day guard)

Medicine Cat-

Shadowflower; black pelt with white spots on her flank, small she-cat with very light blue eyes.

Warriors-

Stormcloud; grey tom with blue eyes, Crowflight's brother, Ripplecurrent's mate.

Tigerstripe; brown tabby tom with black stripes and one black paw, blue eyes, Blossomfrost's mate.

Sparkdust; brown tabby she-cat with white front paws, amber eyes.

Mistnose; grey-and-white she-cat with dark blue eyes.

Foxtuft; dark ginger she-cat with a fluffy tail and white tail tip, yellow eyes.

Snowfern; grey with white patches and green eyes, she-cat. Apprentice- Lionpaw

Ripplecurrent; orange tabby with amber eyes, she-cat.

Apprentices-

Dreampaw; pale grey she-cat with green eyes, Snowfern's daughter.

Lionpaw; fluffy orange tom with white paws, amber eyes, Ripplecurrent's son.

Hollowpaw; black-and-white tom with light blue eyes, Lionpaw's brother, Ripplecurrent's foster-son.

Queens-

Blossomfrost; light fluffy brown fur with white ears and tail tip, pale green eyes, **Darkkit**; dark grey tabby tom with bright blue eyes, **Lilykit**; light grey with darker legs, ears, and tail tip, purple eyes, **Deerkit**; fluffy brown tabby tom, large blue eyes.

Elders-

Currently None-

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StreamClan:

Leader-

Wildstar; white calico she-cat with amber eyes.

Deputy-

Wolftail; large black and brown patched tom, hazel eyes, Chippaw's father, Blackwind's mate.

Guards-

Ghostglow; (description below - night guard)

Crescentmoon; (description below - day guard)

Medicine Cat-

Smoketail; grey tabby tom with a blue tint, dark blue eyes and barely noticeable scars.

Warriors-

Ghostglow; white tom with glowing yellow eyes.

Crescentmoon; black with blue eyes, she-cat. Apprentice- Chippaw

Whisperbreeze; silver tabby she-cat, amber eyes.

Thornfall; black tom, white underbelly, green eyes, Whisperbreeze's brother.

Apprentices-

Chippaw; brown tom with black ears.

Queens-

Blackwind; jet black, light green eyes, she-cat, Thornfall and Whisperbreeze's mother, **Spiderkit**; large black tom with hazel eyes, and **Brookkit**; grey she-kit with dark green eyes.

Amberthroat; small red-brown she-cat with darker stripes on her tail, amber eyes, **Cherrykit**; red-brown she-kit with yellow eyes, **Bonekit**; white tom with a grey muzzle and front legs, dark yellow eyes, **Morningkit**; fluffy golden she-kit with amber eyes.

Elders-

Dawnflower; long light ginger fur, black spots around her blue eyes, she-cat, Amberthroat's mother.

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Cats Outside the Clans:

Leaf; pale brown tabby tom with darker patches, long fangs, dark

green eyes.

Adder; mottled, dark brown she-cat with a white underbelly, dark green eyes, Leaf's sister.

Jinx; black tortoiseshell loner she-cat with white-and-grey splotches, white paws, has cold green eyes and a missing brother named Swipe.

Lark; black loner with grey markings and many scars, crystal blue eyes, tom, usually has his skull-protector on, Jinx's mate.

Chapter Seven

Ghostglow's POV

With stiff, aching legs, I padded back to camp with a pigeon limp in my jaws. It's body was still warm, and it's glistening blood made me drool. I found myself watching its head bounce with every step I took. I was tempted to eat it then and there, knowing no one was around to find me guilty, but I knew there were hungrier warriors back in camp. Swallowing the temptation to devour the warm pigeon, I sped up my pace.

The wind blew through the treetops and swayed the branches. It was eerily quiet, and I didn't like it. For some reason it caused the fur along my spine spike up. The feeling that someone, or something, was watching me stride by made me want to scream.

I watched the moon slip under the horizon to take my mind off of my paranoia while I hurried back to camp. The sky was just starting to brighten; the day was just beginning. I longed to just curl up in my cozy nest and sleep the day away once again.

It had been almost a halfmoon since Lark and Jinx came to our camp saying they were now rogues and that they would stay out of the Clans way unless they were needed. Almost a halfmoon of peace and, surprisingly, there were no incidents... for StreamClan anyway. There was a scream the day Lark and Jinx left, but we didn't go see what had happened. Wildstar and Crowflight suspected someone had been bitten, and it sadly made sense.

My deep thoughts were interrupted by a bird as it called out and took off from a high branch. I flinched, and then watched the black creature flap its wings desperately to get away. Gulping, I trotted off.

Just as I spotted the camp from a distance, my ears perked up when a scream erupted from inside the camps walls. Without thinking, I dashed through the long yellowed grass and into the camp. To my

surprise there were few cats gathered around the nursery. *Is Blackwind giving birth?* I wondered, trotting my way to the fresh-kill pile to drop my kill.

I approached Crescentmoon, the day-guard, "Is Blackwind having her kits?" I murmured to the black she-cat. She nodded, keeping her wide eyes on the nursery. I assumed Wolftail was in the nursery with Smoketail. Bonekit and Cherrykit were tumbling around Amberthroat as she sat at the back of the camp, play-fighting viciously.

Morningkit had distanced herself away from her rough siblings and mother; her legs were folded under her chest and her ears flat to her golden head. She seemed less than interested in her intense siblings and her far-gone mother.

They were a strange litter... but I was sure it was only because the world was messed up, resulting in the survivors being a tad *off*.

There was silence by the time I stopped observing the kits. Within a few long, awkward heartbeats Wolftail exited the den with a gleeful expression. I heard a few cats sigh out of relief. "Blackwind gave birth to a she-cat and a tom, both healthy and feeding eagerly," He announced proudly. The Clan cheered for him. I recalled the day that Ivysplash and Whitefeather were born. It was one of the best days I had ever experienced. *I would do anything to go back to those days,* I sighed to myself, shaking my head.

"What did you name them?" Dawnflower rasped. Wolftail looked over at her and with a cheerful smile, he mewed, "Their names are Brookkit and Spiderkit."

Crescentmoon, Wildstar, Whisperbreeze, and Dawnflower congratulated him and then the deputy quieted everyone down so he could announce the patrols. As she left camp for her duty, I dipped my head to Crescentmoon and then she returned my gesture.

I hurried up to the deputy, told him I was taking a nap but that I would be up for the evening patrols, and then trotted off to the warriors den. There was plenty of leg-space in the den because we

only had four warriors, and, frankly, I loved taking advantage of it. What was even better was that I was the only one who could sleep at that time, so I got to stretch myself out as freely as I wished.
***
I woke up to Thornfall carefully prodding my side with his paw. "Come on, you're going with me to check RockClan's border," I nodded, groaned, and then rolled out of my nest. Standing up, I stretched out my back and legs until I felt - and heard - a satisfying *pop* from my lower spine. By the time I was ready to leave the den, Thornfall had already left to stand by the camp entrance.

The air was just warm enough to let me relax as I trotted over to the young warrior. Thornfall watched me pad up to him and then we headed out. We didn't get much farther than a few paw steps out of the entrance when I tripped over Chippaw. He was alone and looked as if he was in deep thought... not to mention he smelled like smoke and a hint of... something *else*.

"Chippaw, why are you alone?" I narrowed my eyes at him. He swallowed and murmured, "I was out for a walk." Thornfall gave him a look that said, *Are you dumb?* "I am pretty sure you left without telling anyone, and it doesn't make it any better that you were alone. Don't be stupid."

Chippaw nodded eagerly and tried to walk past me. Thornfall practically read my mind, "I think it would be best that you came with us," I nodded in agreement. Chippaw opened his mouth and looked as if he were about to argue, but he then snapped his jaws shut and bowed his head.

We walked in silence to the RockClan border.

As soon as we closed in to renew the territory line, Thornfall and I exchanged confused glances. The young tom glared over into the other territory. Chippaw's eyes narrowed to icy slits, and I could tell he, too, smelt it. "Were they in our territory?" Thornfall hissed to no one in particular, gazing around hatefully. A growl crept up my throat. The smell of RockClan was all around us. It was so strong, I could have sworn they were still there. Thornfall and I ran off in different directions to search for any cats waiting to ambush us, but no one was around.

"They must have just left," I spat when Thornfall stopped in front of me. He nodded. My hatred for that awful Clan was growing by the heartbeat. *First they kill my son, and now they have the nerve to intrude on our territory? What pigs!*

I shook my head with disgust. We all renewed the border and then paused. "Let's go inform Wildstar before they begin to feel free to prowl on our territory..." Thornfall began trotting away and Chippaw and I followed.

It took what seemed to be seasons upon seasons to get back to camp, and when we did, both Thornfall and I immediately hurried over to Wildstar. She was cleaning her chest whilst basking in the newleaf suns' rays. I opened my mouth to politely interrupt her to inform her what was going on, when Thornfall beat me to it. We hadn't of even neared the leader when he spat out what we had found.

"Those stinking RockClan cats were snaking around on our land! We found fresh scent throughout the territory... It was as if they were still there." Wildstar paused mid-lick and listened intently, eyes darkening with each word he had said. The calico leader looked to me. "Is this true, Ghostglow?" I nodded.

She shook her head with disbelief. Wildstar closed her eyes and focused on her thoughts. We gave her time. With her eyes closed, she decided, "If we find fresh scent tomorrow morning or tonight, I will go into their camp myself and demand to know what is going on," Then she finally opened them. "Until then, we leave it be,"

Chapter Eight

Foxtuft's POV

The moon was just sliding down the awakening sky when Silverstar called the meeting. Even though my eyes were already blinking open from her loud, annoying voice, Crowflight made sure he nudged me. "I hear her," I mumbled, and then proceeded to get up before she attracted infected animals of all sorts.

My eyes felt droopy as I sat hunched over in the gathering crowd. The continuous cool breeze fought to keep me up, though. "Crowflight! Are they all up yet? I thought I told you to get them up!" Silverstar growled from her post. He simply ignored her as the rest made their way out. Eventually all the warriors and apprentices had stumbled their way out of their dens to listen to their leader.

"*Finally,*" Silverstar sneered, glancing around at her Clan below. Her eyes were wide as if she hadn't slept all night, her fur stuck up in all the wrong places. Crowflight sighed and plopped his behind down underneath her, chin high. He hid his emotion well and kept his muzzle shut. Silverstar seemed to be the only one with ambition this morning. "As you are all probably wondering, 'Why did she wake me up this early? What is this all about?'" She began in a mocking tone, "Well this announcement is more important than your sleep, I'll tell you that much!"

I glanced to Stormcloud who was sitting firm beside me, who just barely gave a glance back. Lionpaw sat beside his mentor, Snowfern, and couldn't seem to stay still. His ears were alert and his fluffy tail was dancing. *Maybe Silverstar isn't the only one with ambition?*

"I have made a plan and discussed it with my deputy before mentioning anything to anyone else," Silverstar continued. Crowflight didn't seem happy that she mentioned he was a part of this... *plan*. "StreamClan is failing, haven't you noticed? They have four warriors for SoulClan's sake! RockClan is the strongest, and we

can defeat them and take over this new territory... *together!*"She stood there, eyes darting from one cat to the other. The Clan was silent, and Silverstar didn't seem to like that reaction. Even Lionpaw seemed reluctant to make a sound. Her eyes went from bright and hopeful to... what, betrayal?

Despite no one replying, Silverstar was not done. "Their kits won't survive with few warriors to protect them! They are all dying anyways! We will save those kits, and take any warriors into our Clan that don't fully refuse... as for the rest, they will die where they belong..."

Again, silence. I swallowed down the urge to call her out for being crazy; who knows what she would do to someone against her. Silverstar waited for someone to say something, but her patience was fading. The awkward silence was finally broken. "B-but what about the infected! They-they would be attracted from the noise and smell of blood..." Snowfern stuttered and the leader shot her a look, sending the small she-cat curling into herself. I nudged Stormcloud, "Go with it... before she kills one of us..." I whispered through the corner of my mouth without breaking eye contact with the leader. He nodded and passed it on.

Meanwhile, Tigerstripe didn't let it slide. He pushed past Mistnose and Snowfern to stand at the front. "What kind of plan is this? To take over a weak Clan who just needs help? Do you actually believe Wildstar's warriors will bow down to you and come willingly into our Clan after you steal their kits and murder those who disobey you?" His fur spiked up. Silverstar's eyes narrowed as the scrawny warrior challenged her. "Wildstar is *not* stupid! You would put this whole Clan in danger, whether it be from the infected or from StreamClan itself," Then he added in a low voice, "This isn't a plan from a leader... it is a plan from a lunatic."

Silverstar hopped down from her post and purred menacingly. Tigerstripe lifted his chin and refused to let the creepy she-cat intimidate him. "You will go with this plan unless you want to die with those fishing-fools!" She snarled, unsheathing her claws. Sparkdust insisted he listen, and thankfully the warrior took a hint. I noticed him peek over at his mate, who was listening from the nursery entrance, and therefore he said nothing. Silverstar let out

another purr and padded away.

"Anyone else want to say something against my word?"

Nothing but an awkward silence. "That is what I thought... Now, all mentors and apprentices, you will train for this battle everyday. At the next half-moon, we attack."

The next half-moon? That is too soon... She is going to kill us all... I thought, shaking my head.

"Crowflight!" Silverstar yelled, even though the black warrior was right behind her, still sitting quietly, "Get the patrols set up." He dipped his head and padded over beside her.

Crowflight glanced around at the cats, probably situating everything in his head first, and then spoke. "Mistnose, I want you to take Tigerstripe and Foxtuft out to hunt. It is an important role to lead a patrol, especially in this new world, so-" Silverstar gave him a glare and before he could get to the point, she snapped, "Oh get on with it, we don't have all the time in the world, you know!" The deputy scratched his claws into the dirt he stood on, and clenched his jaw. He forced a nod.

"Silverstar will take Snowfern and I out with our apprentices to train, meanwhile Stormcloud and Ripplecurrent can check the territory out, and hunt as you do. Sparkdust-" Crowflight strained to look up over the small group of cats to look for the bright warrior, but she was already heading out to guard. "I am already on it," She chirped, padding out of the camp. The deputy nodded once and went to look for Dreampaw.

Tigerstripe nudged me and I snapped back to reality. Getting to my feet, I caught a glimpse of Crowflight being pulled into the medicine den. Silverstar was talking to Hollowpaw, so I took my chance and walked slowly past the door to see if I could catch anything important. "She has gone insane!" I heard the medicine cat hiss. "I had a dream last night... Not just any. I think it was SoulClan warning me of this... Our warriors will-"

"Are you coming or what?" Mistnose called from the entrance to the

camp and so I hurried off. As we headed away from the camp, all I could hear was Silverstar yelling out her deputy's name.

*****

Everything was silent between the three of us until Tigerstripe began to complain. "I just don't get it. She has driven herself crazy and she is not fit to be a leader! Silverstar is going to kill us all, including StreamClan. They have done nothing but be nice, and all she wants is to kill and steal!" I nodded in agreement but I noticed Mistnose, who was at the front, was pretending she didn't hear. "I mean I see where she is coming from, since StreamClan is so vulnerable right now, but where in SoulClan's name did she ever come up with such a wild idea? There has always been two Clans and she thinks she can just do whatever now that she leads one?"

I sighed and shook my head. "We have all seen so much, so suddenly. Maybe if some cat, or maybe two or three, tries to talk to her..." I trailed off and Tigerstripe kept going. "And get our eyes clawed out? That she-cat wouldn't listen to SoulClan if they came down and spoke to her themselves!" I suddenly remembered what I had overheard.

"Actually, I think SoulClan has spoken to Shadowflower," I began, finally looking up from my paws to look the tom in his eyes. He was confused.

"You mean in a dream, like a prophecy or an omen?" His eyes widened.

I nodded slowly, "I didn't hear everything she told Crowflight, but she said she had a dream and SoulClan was involved. Before I left, I heard 'Our warriors will...' but that was all." Mistnose suddenly seemed interested. "Will what?" She muttered and narrowed her eyes. I shook my head and told her I had no idea.

Mistnose didn't seem convinced. "Maybe SoulClan told Shadowflower we will be successful?"

"She called Silverstar crazy," I scoffed, as if that was pretty obvious. Silence.

The wind blew through the treetops, causing the branches to creak like the fence had that day it collapsed on me. I would forever be thankful for RockClan and StreamClan helping me that day. I looked to my hind leg, and the scar and my slightly deformed ankle gave me a jolt in my chest. *They once worked together to get to there new home... Why would Silverstar hate them now?* I wondered, narrowing my eyes in thought.

"Spread out; we need to focus more on feeding our Clan." Mistnose meowed, and we went our separate ways. Lowering myself to the ground, I made sure my belly was just hovering above the dead leaves and flattened grass. Ears flat and tail curled into my legs, I scanned the undergrowth with my eyes and nose. As silent as a mouse, I crawled my way over to a fallen tree. As the breeze came straight to my face, my nose picked up something I couldn't see, so I stopped and searched in one spot. *I smell a rabbit...* My stomach threatened to growl, so I swallowed.

I could hear something rummaging through the leaves, and I knew it wasn't me. *It has to be on the other side...* I crept my way to the rotten wood and - with my ears still flat to my skull - I peeked over the tree. There it was, just a few tail-lengths away was a grey rabbit nibbling at something I didn't care to find out. It hopped a few steps and then used its nose to move the leaves in search for his last meal. I wriggled my behind and prepared to leap.

With all the remaining strength my body had stored, I pounced up over the fallen tree with my claws extended. My bad ankle gave out on me and a sharp pain pulsed through my leg, so where I went in the air wasn't exactly where I planned to go. My claws just briefly scratched the rabbits flank, but it was enough to send the fat creature rolling. I hit the ground awkwardly, but instantly scrambled to get up. Stunned, he didn't move long enough for me to get to my feet and pounce a second time onto the rabbit.

The rabbit let out a squeal and it kicked at me before I could get to the killing bite. He went limp and I felt proud to bring this home to the Clan that took me in. As I padded away to take it to the patrol, the big rabbit weighed me down and made my neck ache. I suffered through it and went back to the original spot to wait for Tigerstripe and Mistnose.

*****

The two didn't take long to come back, each with a piece of prey for our Clan. Mistnose insisted we keep hunting, and ended up taking us more toward StreamClan's border. As Tigerstripe and I followed the grey she-cat, he brought up how exhausted he was. "I was up all night and she still made me go out for a patrol." He groaned through the crow in his jaws. Then, out of no where, Mistnose halted and decided it was time for her opinion on Silverstar's plan.

"Honestly, for our own sake, I feel like we need to do this." At first, I was confused at what she meant. *The patrol?* I thought, but then I realized she meant follow Silverstar's orders. She continued after no one replied, "What if they ambush first? What if a whole herd of infected animals and two-legs come straight for us and we don't have enough protection?"

I shook my head. "If a whole herd came for us, the two Clans would come together no matter what. StreamClan would never think to attack us for our warriors or territory because Wildstar is sensible." Mistnose didn't say anything, mainly because - as we started to walk again - we almost ran into Silverstar's patrol.

"I'm going to go hunt, and you two should, too." Mistnose muttered, digging a hole for her prey and plopping it in. We dropped ours in there too and piled the loose dirt on top.

Tigerstripe watched the she-cat disappear, and then crept in behind a bush. "I want to see what she is making these apprentices do." I followed and we both laid behind the bush to watch and listen. The patrol was literally at the border, for one, and Lionpaw seemed to be attempting to impress Silverstar.

Crowflight and Snowfern were pretending to fight, it seemed, as they slowly showed the apprentices deadly and complicated moves. Moves that included hitting the throat, confusing their opponent, and how to be sneaky, as if their opponent was prey. "These are advanced moves for warriors... to kill." Tigerstripe sighed, disappointed.

We watched the apprentices try out what they were shown.

Lionpaw pushed past Dreampaw and went first, chin high. Snowfern turned around and sat still, to see if she could hear him. Silverstar did the same for Hollowpaw, who didn't seem comfortable at all. Lionpaw lowered himself down quickly, but he rushed it and didn't notice his belly fur rubbing into the undergrowth. Before he was even three tail-lengths away, Snowfern turned around, which meant to try again.

Hollowpaw was more precise with his movements, but forgot about his tail, which was straight up. He crept his way over to the leader, and stepped on a crispy leaf, giving him away. Meanwhile, Lionpaw tried again, only to fail, and then again, when he finally pounced on Snowfern. Silverstar whipped around and demanded he try again.

"You can always improve, so keep practicing." Snowfern meowed to her apprentice kindly. As Hollowpaw padded back to the start, Crowflight muttered something in his ear. I hoped it was something nice. Hollowpaw raised his chin and fluffed out his fur, preparing for another try. He lowered himself, forgot the tail, and began to creep away. I cringed, only to see Crowflight quickly correct him by lifting his belly with a paw and gently pushing his tail down.

Tigerstripe and I watched for a bit longer, to see him succeed in pouncing on the leader, and by then we almost began to leave. Silverstar looked less than impressed, but nodded to her apprentice nonetheless. Then, as Dreampaw finished her try with Crowflight, Silverstar simply walked across the border, as if it were invisible. Tigerstripe and I exchanged a shocked glance.

Lionpaw followed right behind her, while the others hesitated. The two were too far away for me to hear them, but she was digging a hole now, and obviously instructing him to do the same. When the holes were big enough for your head to fit in it, they stopped... and covered the sight with dead leaves and sticks. She hissed for the others to do it. "What a mousebrain!" Tigerstripe exclaimed and got up.

We dug out our prey when Mistnose came, and left without another word. I could hear Silverstar scorn Hollowpaw as we hurried away, "Why can't you be more like your brother?" And then, "Oh, that's right, you're not exactly his brother, *are you?*"

Chapter Nine

Chippaw's POV

"Wolftail!" I growled, trying to get my fathers attention, but he was too absorbed by his new mate to listen to me. "Wolftail!" I yelled, and then yelled again, attempting to nudge his side. It was like I wasn't even there. When I craned my neck to prod him with my nose, he got farther away without necessarily moving at all. Confused, I tried to hurry toward him to get his attention, but he kept sliding away; each time faster and farther.

I tried to run this time, but my legs seemed to be stalling and my feet were heavier than boulders. I called out to him again, but it was quiet. The wind was so strong it blew me over, and when I turned back to find Wolftail, he was no where to be found... My heart sped up. I could feel it beating in my throat.

A voice spoke to me, "Run..." It was like a whisper directly into my ear; before I could even blink, Wolftail and all of StreamClan's members, possibly even RockClan - there was just so many of them - were all in front of me... coming for me with flesh missing all over their bodies and glossy eyes...

My legs were stiff and I realized that boulder-feeling in my paws hadn't gone away. With all my might, I tried to force myself to run, to do anything. Horrified, I was frozen to the spot.

****

I basically jumped out of my nest when my mind finally woke me up from my nightmare. There was a strange feeling of bugs crawling through my fur... so I chewed at my legs and flank until I realized I had a ball of fur on my tongue. I spat it out and looked around the empty, dark den.

The wind howled and whistled through the apprentices den, shockingly cold breezes making their way around my curled up

body. That was the third time I had been woken up. The odd dream made my heart sore, but I pushed it to the back of my mind. It wasn't like it was real, so why overthink about it?

My eyes stung as I blinked them open, my body wanting more sleep but my mind was just about done with the game. *I will just see where the moon is, and if it's only moon-high then I will continue to try to sleep...* I thought to myself, standing up in my nest and stretching my sore legs.

Groggily, I stepped over empty nests as I made my way out. "At least it wasn't someone's snoring keeping me awake..." I sighed as I exited the den. It was eerily quiet out, with the wind making the trees creak and the occasional moan far off in the territory somewhere. As I focused on the noises around me, I noticed there were faint snores coming from the dens, meaning everyone was asleep.

The moon was just getting past the midnight mark, and after I glanced up at the glowing white ball, I remembered there were things to discover beyond this boring campground. I peered around; not a soul was awake, meaning I was free to explore wherever I pleased until the sun began to wake up.

I followed the shore of the lake, letting my paws do the leading. As my legs took me forward, I gazed at the water beside me. There were ripples throughout the lake from the heavy winds, and a beautiful reflection from the bright moon. The reflection seemed to bounce on the surface. Stars glistened in the dark blue sea above, seemingly blinking down at me. *I was once told those stars are SoulClan warriors watching from above... Are you still watching over us, mother?* I thought as I watched thick clouds roll in. The pebbles below made a satisfying noise as they rubbed together under the pressure of my paws. I felt the need to run... to prove to that nightmare I could outrun any infected creature, to prove to SoulClan above I could run as fast as a rabbit.

Taking off, I bolted down the shoreline. I was a little wobbly as each paw sunk into the pebbles as my weight put pressure on them, but I gained speed quickly. Pebbles and the sand beneath went flying behind me as I tore down the shore. The wind blew at my

face and for a split heartbeat I closed my eyes. In that heartbeat, I breathed in the world around me deeply. When I opened them, there was an oncoming boulder, so I leaped onto it. Pride surged through me, but only for a few heartbeats. Turning to my left, I quickly noticed I was basically on RockClan territory.

Gulping, I got down to a crouching position and crept away, my eyes locked on the camp only tail-lengths away. The Gathering Place came into my line of view and so that is where my paws led me.

I hurried to the clear patch below the huge rocks where the leaders spoke to the Clans. The rocks were so tall... so tempting! Without really thinking it through, I jumped onto the boulders and hopped my way up to the top. "It is your leader, Chipstar!" I began, puffing out my chest and raising my chin. "Ever since I was made leader, StreamClan has been stronger than ever!" My imagination didn't last long as my anxiety kicked in. *RockClan's guard could be watching me right now... Though, Wildstar mentioned RockClan cats have been tresspassing, so what can they say?* I thought as I ducked down and sneaked away.

Feeling vulnerable and out of place, I sniffed around for my next path. There was a choking smoke smell coming from behind the Gathering Place, and suddenly I remembered the Twolegs with big sticks could be still around.

I sprinted toward the edge of the territory, suddenly very curious to see if they were alive. There was a glow off in the distance, and smoke bellowing into the dark sky. As I neared, I slowed down and watched the sparks dance into the sky. Eyes wide and mouth clenched shut, I slowed to a stop only a few tail-lengths away from their fire.

It was the same three Twolegs, and the same few sticks. The only difference was... the one on guard no longer had one of his paws. It looked to be chopped off at the joint... I cringed and felt my fur stand on end. *Poor Twoleg... I wonder what happened?*

The other two were fast asleep, curled up in some form of long nest. I crept around the little circle they had formed. Strong smelling

animal bones were piled up beside the fire, flies buzzing around them along with maggots underneath. My lip curled and I hurried along. Studying the one-armed Twoleg, I watched him use his good arm to pick at the fire with a stick. He blankly stared into the flames until I snapped a stick.

His head shot to the left, where I sat crouched down. My breath caught in my throat and I prepared to bolt away. To my surprise, his eyes softened and he dropped the stick into the fire. Holding out his dirty pink paw, he made a less than impressing meow to me.

My legs were trembling, but I decided to go up to him. *He must be lonely,* I decided as I stalked toward his open paw, *After all, what harm could a one-armed Twoleg do?*

The rugged Twoleg reached out to me and I studied him further. He had spiky fur coming in on his face and his once pink skin was covered in dirt. *Do they not bathe themselves?* I wondered, sniffing his long, odd fingers. He let me sniff, and then I pushed my head against his paw. I watched him smile and then he stroked my back. It felt so strange to let such big paws touch me.

The Twoleg said something in his language, and then turned to the two others and said it again. I found myself purring, and let myself rub against his covered legs. When I opened my eyes, the other two had lifted their heads and were looking at me with surprise. One of them rolled back over, while the she-Twoleg left her nest and sat on the log beside the one-armed Twoleg.

She also reached out with her dirty paws to let me sniff, but I felt no need to. Their smell could be smelt from tail-lengths away, anyway. Like rotten prey, soil, and their body odor. Instead, I nuzzled my rough head against her soft paw and let them pet me. To my surprise, the she-Twoleg grasped me with her paws and sat me in her lap.

Her deep green eyes sparkled with delight, the fur on the top of her head pulled back. *This must be the first time in a while that they have come across anything nice!* I wanted to say something, "My name is Chippaw!" I meowed up at the nice Twolegs. They purred and looked at each other, then meowed at me again.

The Twoleg holding me said something to her friend, and he got up and rummaged through a black sack by the nests. He pulled out a clear packaging with something inside. I wriggled in her grasp, a little frightened by what it could be.

It was a slab of meat. My ears perked up as he offered it to me. I sniffed it. It wasn't like any meat I had ever tried, but it smelt fresh and exciting. I ate up the pieces they gave to me, and hopped onto the ground, rubbing my sides against both of their legs.

Soon I realized where the moon was and knew if I wasn't back by the time the sun comes up, Wolftail would be furious and asking too many questions. "Thank you, Twolegs! I will come again sometime!" I chirped and began to pad away.

The clouds had covered the sky completely by the time I was half way back to the camp. It smelled like rain would be coming, but all I could think about was the discovery of generous Twolegs.

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Sorry for the slow updates, I just assume no one reads these anymore, but if you do, I hope you enjoyed (:

Chapter Ten

Wildstar's POV

Thick clouds covered the entire sky as I led my patrol to the border opposite of RockClan. Crescentmoon and Chippaw trotted in behind me as we neared the territory marks. There was a groaning sound coming from the barrier, meaning there was an infected creature captured in one of our traps. None were caught in the sharpened sticks lined up at the edge of our territory, so I knew it was in one of the many deep holes. I sped up my pace to see what species was there. Chippaw hurried in beside me and wrinkled his nose at the gruesome site of another Twoleg. One of its legs were bent back the other way, maggots eating away at the decaying flesh. It lay, clawing at the dirt with twisted paws, on top of an infected dog that was no longer moving.

"What do we do with it?" Chippaw asked, backing away. Sighing, I wrinkled my nose at the revolting smell of the two rotting bodies and turned to face the growing apprentice. "We will have to leave it and let it starve." I answered, turning around to see two stumbling cats coming our way. Crescentmoon was already on it. She slashed at their faces one at a time, hopping backwards to avoid any bites. One had no fur at all with few oozing gashes here and there - whether it was naturally a sphynx, there was no way to tell - while the other drug its hind leg behind it, its orange tabby fur stained with blood.

I bounded toward Crescentmoon to help her fight them off. The black she-cat swung at the hairless cat and sent it stumbling back, but it immediately was coming after her again. I slashed at the orange cat and backed up, planning to lead it into the hole. It snapped at me, so I kept hopping back to avoid any contact with it.

As I lead the moaning creature toward me, Crescentmoon lashed at the naked cat. It staggered back for a split heartbeat, and during that time Crescentmoon turned and used the back kick technique to send it flying into the wall of sharpened sticks. The sound of the

sticks piercing through its infected body made my stomach turn, but I had to focus on leading the orange cat to its dungeon. It squirmed and kept moaning even with the stick jabbing out of its stomach.

I gave the orange cat a few blows to the head and then pushed it with my front paws into the hole. It tumbled onto a white cat, its face sunken in and one eye missing. They stared up at me with open jaws, clawing at the dirt. The white cats' paws were raw from trying to get out. *Soon the orange cat will have raw paws too,* I thought, turning to face Chippaw and Crescentmoon.

"How could you do this to me?" A familiar voice whimpered. I froze, my heart leaping. Crescentmoon, on the other paw, was teaching Chippaw the same move she had used. Neither of them seemed to have heard the voice. "Help me!" I slowly turned around, expecting to see a cat in need of help. Instead the calls for help echoed from the hole.

"Why, sister? We are your Clanmates!" The white cat sobbed. I blinked, and all of a sudden Lightfeather and Spottedfire were gazing up at me. A lump formed in my throat and I felt a whimper escape my lips. *Ignore it! The trauma is getting to you; you have to be strong for your Clan!* "Help me! Help me!" They chanted, reaching up to me. The trance filled my heart with sorrow, *I'm so sorry I couldn't save you...* "Don't leave me here to die!"

My heart sped up and I started breathing heavily, feeling lightheaded. I felt a nudge in my side, jolting me from my imagination. "Are you okay? We were calling your name but you didn't answer," Crescentmoon meowed, her eyes filled with concern.

I nodded and took a deep breath. "I'm alright, just had a flashback. Are you two going to train before you stay to guard?" They exchanged glances, and then Crescentmoon replied, "I think he learned enough for today. When I finish watching over the barriers, I will take him out tonight for some hunting." I dipped my head in agreement and wished her luck as Chippaw and I headed back to the camp.
***

Chippaw padded into the camp first and was welcomed by his father. The young apprentice ducked from his tail, embarrassed, and hurried to the fresh-kill pile. Wolftail snorted and watched his son pad away. "Do you think that's normal for him to give me such attitude?"

"I think he's mad about your new mate, if anything. He's young, and is also Loudbird's son!" Pain filled his eyes for a moment, but when he turned to face me he had hid it with humor. "True that," He murmured.

I decided to switch the subject to our current problems instead of focusing on the past. "As for the border patrol, there have been different kinds of infected creatures venturing toward our barriers. A Twoleg had fallen into one of the holes on top of the dog we fought the other day." He nodded as I spoke, taking in the information with narrowed eyes.

"So we should keep up daily patrols, especially ones to check on Crescentmoon and Ghostglow. Should we update the sharpened sticks and try to come up with new traps?" Wolftail tipped his head to the side. I considered it, *Would it do anything to make new traps? What would these 'new traps' even be? We can barely dig out a hole big enough for a Twoleg with such a low number of warriors...*

I took a deep breath. "I will ask the Clan of their ideas for new traps and how we should go about it. After all, this is *our* Clan, not just mine or yours. We should also consider giving Chippaw an assignment to see how well he is doing with his training. We need all of the warriors we can get at this point." Wolftail's eyes brightened and he gave me an eager nod. "I'll keep that a secret!" He chirped.

Before we could go any farther with ideas, Smoketail burst into the camp with Whisperbreeze limping in behind him. The medicine cat had asked that a warrior come with him to get more herbs. I instantly stood up and hurried to her side. "Those mouse-brained RockClan cats dug holes in our territory! I could smell their retched scent from tail-lengths away, and when we went to investigate, Whisperbreeze tripped in a hidden hole. Luckily nothing is broken, and that I was there to wrap it up." Smoketail was furious, fur

spiked up and ears back.

A growl rose in my throat, tail lashing. "Wolftail, watch the camp. I'm going to speak to Silverstar right now." As I headed out of the camp, a warrior came up behind me. "I'm coming with you. You never know what those fools will do..." I turned to face Thornfall. Dipping my head to him, we trotted out of camp and toward RockClan.
***

I almost hesitated as I crossed their border, but I knew no warrior had any good reason to stop a leader from entering their territory, especially under such circumstances. Their camp was in plain view from that moment we entered their territory. We headed toward the flat rock, rage pulsing through my veins.

Neither Thornfall nor me spoke, we just hurried to their camp in silence. With Thornfall on my tail, I hopped up onto the boulders and let myself in. Many cats turned to face us with concerned facial expressions. A few were hostile but remained mute.

"I need to speak to your leader. *Now*." I snarled, looking to each of the warriors faces. A few narrowed their eyes, while two looked away. *They know something is up!* As I went to demand for Silverstar again, Crowflight appeared out of the leaders den.

"Where is Silverstar? I don't want to talk to you, I need to have a word with the one who makes the decisions around here!" I snapped, taking a step toward the tall black deputy. Calmly, he announced, "Silverstar is ill and wishes for me to speak to the intruder."

I let out a bitter purr. "The *intruder*, you say? I came to your camp to ask why there are hidden holes in my camp, reeking of *your* Clan! I would say someone *here* is the intruder, not me!" Crowflight tipped his head to the side as if he didn't know what I was talking about. "I apologize for the injury of your warrior, but it must have been one of our apprentices disobeying orders. We wouldn't let any cat into your territory unless there was a reason."

"This sounds fishy..." I scoffed, "How would an apprentice get across

our borders without someone seeing? Why would they come and dig holes, too? Do not lie to me, Crowflight." There was a purr from beside me. "We're not the ones who smell fishy," Someone snickered and I watched Thornfall out of the corner of my eye whip around to face the cat, teeth bared.

As I kept my eyes locked with Crowflights, he shook his head with no emotions showing in his eyes. "I'm sorry but I'm not lying, Wildstar,' he insisted.

"Then keep your apprentices away from my borders. We need all of our warriors to be healthy at a time like this! If this, or anything like this, happens again, we will be here looking for a fight." I spat, teeth bared and fur spiked up.

I stormed out of the camp and hurried back to my territory. Thornfall took a heartbeat longer to follow in behind me, clearly distressed and unsatisfied with the answer we had gotten. When we were close to our border, Thornfall muttered, "They are full of mouse-dung... I know for a fact that it was on purpose! It made no sense that an apprentice would just wander into an enemies territory only to dig holes!" I nodded in agreement, "They must be planning something. We need to be on guard at all times..."

Thornfall gave me one stern nod, "I will stay up tonight with Ghostglow to help patrol the territory." He offered. I thanked him and mentioned Chippaw will do the same with Crescentmoon the following morning.

"Wait!" A voice called. *Not this again...* I expected it to be a flashback, but to my relief Thornfall had heard it too. We both glanced over our shoulders. A slender tabby hurried toward us, with a familiar bushy red cat in behind him. "I mean no harm! I have something to tell you!" The tom hissed, trying to keep his voice low. Thornfall and I waited; he unsheathed his claws but stood firm.

It was Tigerstripe and Foxtuft. "Silverstar has gone crazy. I cannot tell you her thoughts out of fear that she will kill me, but I insist you be careful." He panted. Foxtuft held a sparrow in her jaws and kept her gaze to the ground. With narrowed eyes, I dipped my head to him and padded away without a word.

Chapter Eleven

Snowfern's POV

Blinking open my eyes, I could hear voices murmuring to each other. Light filtered through the entrance of the warriors den. I recognized the voices as Mistnose and Ripplecurrent. Watching them through narrowed eyes, they meowed to each other while Stormcloud snored beside his mate. "But don't you think she has let the power get to her head?" Ripplecurrent muttered, tail flicking.

Mistnose shrugged, "I think she has a point. We need more warriors, and StreamClan doesn't have enough cats to support their Clan anyway! One Clan, working together, would keep us strong against those... insane creatures..." Ripplecurrent blinked at the gray she-cat but stayed silent for a few heartbeats, possibly considering it. "We have been two Clans for seasons upon seasons... I don't know if I would feel comfortable sleeping in the came camp as those fish-breathed cats. Plus, our ancestors would be so disappointed to find out we are teaming up with our enemies."

I sat up. "The infected are our enemies now," They shot a glance over their shoulders, eyes wide out of surprise. "I will do whatever I need to, to protect Dreampaw..."

Foxtuft stood up and stretched in her nest, but didn't say anything about the debate that was going on. She simply stalked out of the den without saying a word. Mistnose continued nonetheless, "I feel like your ancestors are nothing more than a tale you are all told as a kit. Even if they do watch over you, at a desperate time like this, I'm sure they won't judge!" She purred, as if this was a light topic, something you could joke about. *Some of these outsiders are more ignorant than a kit...*

"Our ancestors *will* judge. We are changing the warrior code!" Ripplecurrent growled. Mistnose's ears twitched. The orange she-cat persisted, "So, what? She's going to ask StreamClan to join our Clan as one, when they already think we are mouse-brained for the

holes, that our *leader* decided to dig? Or are we going to take them by force? Those warriors will plan an attack on us in our sleep if they are forced to live with us!"

I fluffed out my fur and cleaned it up. *This whole 'attack StreamClan' idea is going too far. If only we could go back and start over...* The thought of fighting possibly the only live cats left could be deadly to everyone, but to keep Dreampaw safe, working together could be the only way.

Mistnose slowly nodded to Ripplecurrent before adding, "I understand that but we need all of the warriors we can get. Silverstar wouldn't be leader if she didn't know what was good for us! We have to trust her." The thick-furred orange she-cat didn't say anything more, only got up and padded out of the den.

Stormcloud jolted awake and looked around to be greeted with staring eyes. Confused, he left the den with his mate. I decided to follow, leaving Mistnose in the den by herself.

When I entered the clearing, my pads were surged with warmth from the rocks below as they absorbed the suns' early rays. I kneaded my claws into the cracks and then headed to the fresh-kill pile. Dreampaw and Lionpaw tumbled around the clearing, hissing as they fought with sheathed paws.

The fresh-kill pile was dangerously low. I considered eating later, when I could catch my own prey. *If Dreampaw hasn't eaten, we could share that rabbit...* I thought, mouth watering. Turning to the messy apprentice, I called, "Dreampaw, have you eaten?" She was too busy batting the fluffy orange tom to answer. I padded over to her and waited for her to see me. They stopped in mid-tumble, both tangled in a ball of orange and silver.

"Hi, Snowfern!" She purred, releasing her grip from Lionpaw's scruff. She stood up and shook out her pelt, twigs and dead leaves flying off. She was as tall as me! Lionpaw was half of her size, but thicker with muscle. Dreampaw was slender, her pelt almost shining in the sun. I was filled with pride knowing she was growing up so quickly. It also worried me, but I couldn't think like that all of the time. "Have you eaten?" I repeated, tilting my head to the side.

My energetic kit nodded, "Lionpaw, Hollowpaw, and I ate a big crow earlier!" I dipped my head and purred, licking the fur on the top of her head, "Good for you." She ducked away, obviously embarrassed.

Silverstar emerged from her den. Her fur was already cleaned up, suggesting she had been up just as long as me. Crowflight was sitting beside her den, watching through blank eyes. Sparkdust finished her mouse and kicked it off the edge of the rocks to the grass below. Tigerstripe nodded to the small brown she-cat as he entered the camp, and ducked into the warriors den to sleep the day away. Sparkdust headed out after dipping her head to Crowflight.

Mistnose sat beside the entrance to the warriors den, cleaning herself. Ripplecurrent lay with Hollowpaw, basking in the sun. I felt bad that Dreampaw didn't ever play with the black-and-white tom like she did with Lionpaw. Lionpaw didn't exactly treat him fairly, either.

We all waited for Crowflight to announce patrols. Silverstar murmured something to the black deputy, and together they took a few heartbeats to talk to each other. I tried to listen to what they were saying, "-don't need to hear anymore of this battle." Crowflight muttered, eyes straight ahead. Silverstar hissed something I couldn't catch, her back to me. Crowflight's eyes turned to slits, and then looked the silver cat in the eyes. "-too far, we need to focus-"

The chatter around me was too loud and too close for me to focus on one conversation. I shook my head and sighed. Anxiety made my heart speed up as thoughts swirled like a whirlpool in my brain. *What will happen today? Will there be more infected dogs, or even Twolegs? Is today the day someone gets hurt? Will Dreampaw be able to fend for herself if a herd of infected comes in?*

My thoughts were interrupted by Crowflight as he padded to the front of the gathered cats. "Alright, RockClan, it is another day in this chaotic world! On the bright side, we are alive and well." He started off; no one purred at his humor. The deputy continued, unfazed. "For the first patrol, we need more prey. Mistnose and Stormcloud, you two will hunt until you both have at least two fresh-kill each. Foxtuft, take Snowfern and Lionpaw to patrol the

territory as well as hunting whatever you come across. In the meantime, try to get some training in, too, Snowfern." Crowflight made eye contact with me as Mistnose and Stormcloud headed out. The tom touched noses with Ripplecurrent as he passed by. I nodded to the deputy and stood up.

"I will take Dreampaw and Hollowpaw out for training," He announced. Silverstar shot a glare at him. "I can take them out, I'm capable." She snapped. The deputy stood up, chin raised, and insisted, "No worries, Silverstar, we need someone here to protect camp. I figured you could do that instead of taking the apprentices out." Before the leader could argue anymore, Blossomfrost popped out of the nursery den with her three energized kits bounding in behind her, asking if she could bring her kits out for a short walk.

Crowflight pondered it and met eyes with the last remaining warrior in the camp: Ripplecurrent. I figured she already knew what he was about to say because she stood up. "Ripplecurrent, you can protect Blossomfrost and her kits while they explore. I suggest taking them toward the lake, away from the outside barrier." The light brown she-cats' eyes lit up and then quickly gathered up her kits.

Foxtuft led us out of the camp. Behind us, we could hear the excited meows of the three kits. I looked over my shoulder and purred. "We're going to the lake, mother?" Lilykit chirped, and Blossomfrost nodded, nudging her forward with her nose.

"I'm going to catch the biggest mouse ever today!" Deerkit boasted, chest puffed out. Darkkit wriggled his haunches behind his brother and pounced on him, "Not if I get to it first!" Deerkit scrambled to get up as Darkkit took off. Blossomfrost hurried to catch up with them while Lilykit trotted in behind her, taking in the scenery. Ripplecurrent stayed by her side and together they followed the two kits as Blossomfrost fought to keep up.

I stopped staring when Foxtuft began to speak. "We should start off by checking the Gathering Place for any outsiders. I've noticed a trail of smoke bellowing into the sky some nights... It could very well mean we have Twolegs outside of our territory. After that, we should check the farthest border." I nodded as she spoke. We

headed straight for the Gathering Place.

We trotted to the Gathering Place, and by the time we neared the clearing the sky was growing dark from white clouds. It felt nice to have a break from the warm sun. The wind blew around us, sending chills down my spine. Leaf-fall was coming, and soon prey would be even more scarce.

From the moment we hit the clearing, I could smell the odd scent of Twolegs. It was still fresh. "We should check in behind the rock together," I meowed. Foxtuft nodded and with Lionpaw in between us, we slowly made our way toward the smell. It continued to get stronger until we got to a couple of thick bushes.

Lionpaw pushed past us and before we could stop him, he stuck his head into the bush. We waited for him to tell us what he was seeing. Automatically, Foxtuft and I exchanged glances, knowing what he seen by the way his fur spiked up. He backed up and whispered, "There are two Twolegs huddled together around a circle of rocks. There are three nests, so I think there's a third!"

Concern filled Foxtuft's eyes. "Good observing," I meowed to the tom, and then chose the next move. "We should leave them alone and tell Silverstar-" but Foxtuft stopped me. "We will tell Crowflight. Silverstar makes decisions too quickly." I obeyed even though I didn't agree. *The leader should be informed first, not the deputy.* I thought, but I kept it to myself.

After that, we headed to the farthest border to check on Sparkdust and the traps. We were all silent.

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We followed the farthest border toward StreamClan's side. None of us had said anything since we had discovered the Twolegs. Just then, a screech echoed through the sky. The patrol froze for a split heartbeat, just enough time to take in that someone was in trouble.

Together, we bolted toward the scream. Foxtuft stopped, but neither Lionpaw nor me stopped with her or took the time to see what she was doing. She caught up again with a sharpened stick,

teeth marks on the end showing that she did it on her own. We passed by blurred barriers and deep holes as we raced to help the cat in need. The scream came again, but this time we could see who was yelping. Sparkdust batted at two massive, bloody dogs as they snapped at her and entered the territory. She was limping. My heart skipped a beat; knowing she was injured gave me the adrenaline I needed to get there before they cornered her.

Bolting toward the nearest dog, I bunched up my leg muscles and pounced at it. All fear was lost for once in my life. I shoved the dog back with all the power in me, but he only fell onto his side instead of tumbled away. The thick furred, black-and-brown dog snapped at me with its long snout, but I dodged every bite. I sliced his face and lured him out of the territory while Foxtuft jabbed the stick through the other dogs' soft, rotting skull. Getting the stick in was easy, but getting it out was the hard part. Foxtuft didn't waste time trying to get it out, instead she left the limp carcass and came to help me.

As the dog came stumbling closer to the side of the hole, she bounded toward it and with one massive push, she sent it rolling into the trap. It landed on top of a moaning cat. The cat stopped moaning.

Foxtuft and I ran to Sparkdust's side. She was already leaning on Lionpaw for support. Lionpaw eyed her front leg. There was a bleeding bite, only small but deadly... My heart sank. *We're too late...*

Sparkdust's breath was raspy and her eyes were wide with fright. "I'm okay! It-it's only small, maybe I wont turn?! Don't tell Silverstar! I-I'll be fine!" She begged, her fur fluffed out. We all exchanged uncertain glances. None of us seemed to know what to say. "I don't want to die!" Her voice cracked. Grief welled up inside of me, a lump of sorrow stuck in my throat. I tried to swallow it, but it refused to diminish.

Finally Foxtuft said something. "We won't let you turn. We must tell Silverstar, if not her, we will tell Crowflight and Shadowflower," Foxtuft mewed. Her voice got low as she pressed her russet colored head to the horrified she-cats cheek, "but there is no way to help you."

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I squeezed my eyes shut and rested my tail over my muzzle. The night was slowly going by, but I still couldn't fall asleep. Stormcloud's snoring usually was like a lullaby, but that night it was more annoying than anything. I adjusted my position by flipping over and even stretching.

No matter what I did, I couldn't sleep. Anxiety filled my head with possible - and impossible - scenarios. *That could have happened to anyone... No one is safe.*

Sparkdust's whimper could be heard through out the camp. It echoed through the silent night. I felt like whimpering myself. The fever was setting in and by the next morning, Shadowflower would have to have her... taken care of. We promised her to not let her turn, so she could live for eternity with her kin in SoulClan. This meant the goal was to put her into permanent sleep before that happened.

Her whines filled my ears, and haunted my dreams after I finally managed to pass out. I stirred and rolled, unable to get the images of her horrified face out of my memories.

Chapter Twelve

Whisperbreeze's POV

"I, Wildstar, leader of StreamClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn." Wildstar paced around the front of the group, facing us with a high chin. For once, the small Clan of ours was beaming with pride. Finally we were getting stronger, one warrior at a time. Chippaw sat at the front of the small crowd, his back straight and his tipped ears even straighter. He seemed to be handling his excitement well, unlike his father who couldn't sit still. I couldn't help but purr as Wolftail sat behind Wildstar, fidgeting with eagerness.

"Chippaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?" The leader looked into the toms' eyes.

He gave her one stern nod and replied, "I do."

"Then by the powers of SoulClan, I give you your warrior name. Chippaw, from this moment on you will be known as Chipear. SoulClan honors your humor and strength, and we welcome you as a full warrior of StreamClan." The calico she-cat rested her muzzle on his head as he licked her shoulder. He immediately turned to face his Clan, satisfaction glowing in his eyes. StreamClan, as one, cheered his new name, "Chipear! Chipear!"

I hobbled up to the new warrior and shared my congratulations. Meanwhile, Wildstar stayed at the front with Wolftail at her side, suggesting that they weren't done talking. After everyone settled, she gathered everyone together again. "Chipear, you will be a half-time day guard. We need all of the protection we can get. Thornfall has offered to be the half-time night guard, as well." A few cats murmured, but no one spoke up to argue. My brother straightened his back with gratification.

"As for the traps, I was thinking we should all brainstorm some new ideas. Any recommendations?" Wildstar glanced around hopefully. Cats exchanged glances but no one said anything. I racked my brain for any idea, but I couldn't think of anything new. "I thought maybe we could all think about it instead of Wolftail and I coming up with the ideas," She continued after an awkward silence.

Blackwind was the first to speak her mind. "What if we had some kind of Twoleg rope to tie around two trees in front of the holes? That way, Twolegs would trip on their own instead of the warriors having to lure them toward it." I turned to Smoketail and mumbled, "She has a good point." He nodded with his eyes narrowed but said nothing.

Wildstar was pleased, "Awesome idea."

Ghostglow chimed in next. "I think the sharp wire they use would be even better. It's all over the tops of the Twoleg fences." Cats murmured their agreements, but Crescentmoon didn't agree.

"The Twolegplaces are probably infested with the infected, Twolegs and dogs especially. It would be too risky." She stated and her left ear twitched. "We would have to peek over the fences to make sure it's clear and safe, and if not we won't even bother." Ghostglow replied. Wildstar nodded but let the warriors have their debate.

The trees above danced in the breeze, rusty red and golden leaves fluttering down to the ground. The wind was chilly and the sky was grey. *What if we used sticks to defend ourselves?* I wondered. "I have another idea," I called, standing up on my three good paws. Every face in the Clan turned to me as if to say, *We're waiting.*

"Go ahead," Wildstar insisted when I hesitated.

"Well, I was thinking... What if we sharpened limbs from trees to kill the infected easier? We could practice stabbing them in the head." Almost every cat nodded, but Crescentmoon remained skeptical. "How would a stick jab through a cats *skull*, let alone a *dogs*?"

I didn't know how to respond, but luckily Smoketail saved me from

having to say anything. "Actually, the Twolegs, dogs, and cats with the infection are still slowly decaying. At one point, if everyone can avoid their bites, I presume that each infected creature would keep rotting until their bodies cannot move anymore, meaning the infection would die out. Therefore, at this point, sticks could do the job."

Wildstar seemed satisfied, "Good point, Smoketail. I think we have enough ideas for today. Wolftail, if you would set out the patrols?" The large black-and-brown tom dipped his head and picked the cats out for each patrol.

As the small patrols headed out to hunt and check out the territory, I felt myself yearning to go out and help the Clan. Usually I would dread getting out of bed to do duties, but now that I had nothing exciting to do, I realized how good it was to be a warrior. Helping Smoketail was generous and all, but it certainly wasn't adventurous. I glanced down to my wrapped paw. Smoketail had lathered my ankle in a poultice made of elder leaves with two small sticks to hold it in place. He used bindweed to hold it together. I wondered how much longer it would take for it to heal...

Ghostglow was already in the warriors den after his long night patrolling, while Chipear and Crescentmoon headed out to scope out the territory before they settled to guard. Thornfall, Wolftail, and - to my surprise - Amberthroat were picked out to search for rope and wire in the Twolegplace.

Laying outside of the medicine den, I tried to get as much of the warm sun as I could before the clouds rolled in. I was jolted - literally - from my thoughts as the deputy mentioned my name. "Whisperbreeze, I was thinking you could watch the kits so Amberthroat and Blackwind could go on a short patrol. Would you like to teach their kits the basics of fighting? They can never start to learn too early with... the rivals." Wildstar dipped her head in approval. My ears perked up. *Train kits? This should be interesting.*

I nodded gratefully and limped up to the tumbling kits. "I would love to. It will keep me motivated and occupied!" I purred. Spiderkit and Bonekit were chasing each other; Bonekit snapped at the black toms tail as Spiderkit ran in circles. *How are they not dizzy?* I

wondered.

As the last of the patrols headed out, I sat the kits down to begin. Spiderkit and Morningkit sat with their eyes wide, seemingly impatient. Bonekit slumped, his eyes showing that he was less than interested. Brookkit's tail flicked and she kneaded the ground with her claws. Meanwhile, Cherrykit sat and looked around the camp. When she noticed Brookkits tail twitching, her muscles stiffened as if she were getting ready to pounce.

"Okay, kits, today you will be learning the basics of fighting!" I chirped. Spiderkit and Morningkit let out a squeal, Bonekit grunted, while the other two did their own thing. "What happened to your paw?" Cherrykit mewed, tilting her head to the side. I let out a purr, "I tripped. Anyways, let's get started."

I stood up and lifted my injured paw, keeping the good one firmly on the ground for balance. Swiping the air, I asked, "Do you know what that move is called?" The kits remained still and quiet, except for Spiderkit, Morningkit, and Cherrykit - I managed to catch her attention - who shook their heads. "It's called the front paw blow! You bring your front paw down as hard as you can on your opponents face or body with your claws, but right now we will keep them sheathed!" They all nodded, even Bonekit. He was actually sitting up by then, his eyes fixed on me.

"Now, you can try it on each other. Remember to keep your claws away." I told them. Spiderkit and Bonekit, Morningkit and Cherrykit all paired together. Since Brookkit seemed timid and had no partner, I stood in front of her. "Cherrykit and Bonekit, attack your partner and then switch! Try to dodge them, Morningkit and Spiderkit!"

They each let out little yowls as they dodged their small paws and tried to bat their opponent. Brookkit swiped, but she kept closing her eyes, so she barely got close enough to even touch my legs. I took a step forward and meowed softly, "It works better with your eyes open."

Bonekit was learning quickly; he had hit Spiderkit several times before the black tom managed to learn to dodge. Cherrykit pounced

forward and hit Morningkit square in the face, so Morningkit fought back. Meanwhile, Spiderkit started matching Bonekit's hits, until Bonekit yelped, "Whisperbreeze said no claws!" The white tom backed away, displeased.

"Okay, we can try something else now! You're all very quick learners."

I gathered them together again and sat them down. "Now, let's say your enemy pins you down. What do you do?" I asked, glimpsing around at each of the curious kits. Cherrykit and Brookkit were confused, while the others racked their brains to figure it out.

Spiderkit was the first to reply, "You could... headbutt them!" His eyes were wide with hope. I purred, "Close, but that would hurt you just as much as it would them! Any other suggestions?" Bonekit tilted his head to the side as well as Morningkit.

The golden she-kit meowed next, "Scratch their belly because it's a weak spot?" I nodded in agreement, "Correct!" Morningkit straightened her stance and looked at the other kits through the corner of her eyes, obviously joyous that she had gotten it right.

I decided not to have them in the position until they were apprentices, so I got them to practice the moves on their backs. Even Bonekit and Brookkit purred with amusement at how silly they looked. "Your back legs are stronger than the front, so focus on raking their belly hard, as if you were trying to push them off at the same time!" None of them took the exercise seriously, each were kicking their legs out in sloppy circles.

After that, I placed a stick in the center of the clearing and drew a line in the dirt about two tail-lengths away. "Brookkit, you can go first! I just want you to practice jumping from this line to the stick." Brookkit wearily padded over to the line and wriggled her haunches, preparing to leap. Everyone watched as she pounced forward. She didn't make it too far, but it was still good for a small, inexperienced kit. Next was Spiderkit, her brother. He was much larger, but even with more muscle he only made it as far as Brookkit.

Cherrykit decided to go next. She took a running start and leaped forward. With her front legs extended out straight, she managed to get farther than the two before her. Her back paws were close to hitting the front prints from Spiderkit and Brookkit before her. She trotted away with her chin high. The red-brown she-kit nudged Bonekit and then Morningkit, "Beat that!"

Her siblings managed to get a bit farther than Spiderkit and Brookkit, but overall Cherrykit made it the farthest. "Good job everyone. For your first exercises, you're all doing well!" I praised them and each of them looked satisfied.

Dawnflower was sprawled out in the sun outside of the small elders den, her hips jutting out and her fur rugged. With one eye opened she called, "Yeah, they may be rascals but they're born to be fierce warriors." Cherrykit and Morningkit bounded over to her and attacked her tail, their own tails sticking up high.

"Hey!" The two kits hurried away. The elder hissed, sitting up, "Back off before I bite *your* tail." She was serious but there was a hint of humor in her voice. The ginger she-cat watched them run away with narrowed eyes.

For the final training session, I got them to practice stalking silently toward a leaf. "Imagine these leaves are prey that you're going to bring home to your Clan!" I told them as they each squatted down. Brookkit was, by far, the one in the best position. Bonekit's tail was still up as well as his ears, while Cherrykit and Morningkit's haunches were sticking up. Spiderkit's body was raised a bit too high, but he was doing good for his first try, too.

I took my time to fix their posture, using my paw to adjust them. "Bring you bodies down so that your belly is *almost* touching the ground, but not quite. Your ears, haunches, and tail should be down so no one can be alerted by your presence," I told them. Cherrykit's haunches kept popping up, so I eventually just gave up after mentioning, "You'll get used to it when you're older, don't worry."

Just as they began to hunt their targets, Wolftail's patrol came in with nothing but a pigeon. I stood up straight, curious to hear what had happened. Smoketail poked his head out of his den for the first

time since the morning and headed out to meet the deputy. "No luck?" He asked.

Wolftail shook his head and sighed. "Crescentmoon was right. It is infected. We even tried to go around and find a safer way in, maybe on the rooftops, but nothing was safe." Thornfall headed to the fresh-kill pile to drop the prey in. He pressed his nose to my cheek as he passed by. Amberthroat padded in to stand beside Wolftail and added, "Some of the Twoleg dens were burnt down, some were falling apart, while the rest were too far out to get to." Her voice was cold.

Chipear came in as Smoketail responded solemnly, "Oh well, it was worth a try." Wolftail turned to face his son. He tried to have a conversation with the young tom, but he was unenthusiastic. Behind me, I could hear Amberthroats kits telling her all about their day.

"I know how to stalk prey now, momma!" Morningkit meowed, "Watch me!" The golden kit bent down and chased a leaf as it blew through the clearing. Amberthroat met eyes with me and for once, I seen a glimpse of amusement in her amber eyes. Cherrykit chased her sister around the clearing, circling their mother. Bonekit watched them until Spiderkit came up behind him and leaped onto his back.

As the kits played around, Wildstar and Blackwind came in with a mouse and a rabbit. The kits immediately stopped to take a look at the fat brown rabbit. "When can we eat *real* meat?" Spiderkit pouted, following his mother to the fresh-kill pile. "Not for a while, Spiderkit. Did you have fun training?" She purred.

"It *was* fun! We learned the front paw blow and how to defend ourselves if we get pinned down!" Spiderkit announced. Brookkit looked tired as she drug her paws toward Blackwind. "I'm hungry..." She whined. Her brother yawned, too and nodded in agreement.

Wolftail met up with the leader and asked how the patrol went. "No sign of RockClan on our territory, but we still need to stay alerted for any warnings. Prey is scarce, but we can manage." Wildstar meowed, worry filling her gaze. She turned to face the Clan,

"Blackwind, Amberthroat, I want you two to eat immediately. I'll bring Dawnflower that mouse I caught. The rest of you can share what is left!" The two queens picked up the rabbit and took it to Dawnflower for the three to share. Wildstar was relieved.

"Wolftail, do you mind going out again with Thornfall before he goes out to fetch more prey?" She asked the large tom. Wolftail agreed as well as Thornfall. "While you're out, get some thick sticks and we will start preparing that idea Whisperbreeze mentioned."

Thornfall brought over the mouse Wildstar had caught and together we shared it. I savored the stringy flesh but I could only hold back my hunger for so long. My stomach was empty and I could feel my ribs sticking out. All was okay for now, but how much longer could we last with such small amounts of prey a day?

Allegiances #3

RockClan:

Leader-

Silverstar; thin, silver she-cat with dark silver stripes, left blue eye and right green eye.

Deputy-

Crowflight; grey and black tabby tom, amber eyes. Apprentice- Hollowpaw

Guards-

Tigerstripe; (description below - night guard)

Stormcloud; (description below - day guard)

Medicine Cat-

Shadowflower; black pelt with white spots on her flank, small she-cat with very light blue eyes.

Warriors-

Stormcloud; grey tom with blue eyes, Crowflight's brother, Ripplecurrent's mate.

Tigerstripe; brown tabby tom with black stripes and one black paw, blue eyes, Blossomfrost's mate.

Mistnose; grey-and-white she-cat with dark blue eyes.

Foxtuft; dark ginger she-cat with a fluffy tail and white tail tip, yellow eyes.

Snowfern; grey with white patches and green eyes, she-cat.

Apprentice- Lionpaw

Ripplecurrent; orange tabby with amber eyes, she-cat.

Dreamfeather; pale grey she-cat with green eyes, Snowfern's daughter.

Apprentices-

Lionpaw; fluffy orange tom with white paws, amber eyes, Ripplecurrent's son.

Hollowpaw; black-and-white tom with light blue eyes, Lionpaw's brother, Ripplecurrent's foster-son.

Queens-

Blossomfrost; light fluffy brown fur with white ears and tail tip, pale green eyes, **Darkkit**; dark grey tabby tom with bright blue eyes, **Lilykit**; light grey with darker legs, ears, and tail tip, purple eyes, **Deerkit**; fluffy brown tabby tom, large blue eyes.

Elders-

Currently None-

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StreamClan:

Leader-

Wildstar; white calico she-cat with amber eyes.

Deputy-

Wolftail; large black and brown patched tom, hazel eyes, Chipear's father, Blackwind's mate.

Guards-

Ghostglow; (description below - night guard)

Crescentmoon; (description below - day guard)

Medicine Cat-

Smoketail; grey tabby tom with a blue tint, dark blue eyes and barely noticeable scars.

Warriors-

Ghostglow; white tom with glowing yellow eyes.

Crescentmoon; black with blue eyes, she-cat.

Whisperbreeze; silver tabby she-cat, amber eyes.

Thornfall; black tom, white underbelly, green eyes, Whisperbreeze's brother. (half-time night guard)

Chipear; brown tom with black ears. (half-time day guard)

Apprentices-

Currently None-

Queens-

Blackwind; jet black, light green eyes, she-cat, Thornfall and Whisperbreeze's mother, **Spiderkit**; large black tom with hazel eyes, and **Brookkit**; grey she-kit with dark green eyes.

Amberthroat; small red-brown she-cat with darker stripes on her tail, amber eyes, **Cherrykit**; red-brown she-kit with yellow eyes, **Bonekit**; white tom with a grey muzzle and front legs, dark yellow eyes, **Morningkit**; fluffy golden she-kit with amber eyes.

Elders-

Dawnflower; long light ginger fur, black spots around her blue eyes, she-cat, Amberthroat's mother.

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Cats Outside the Clans:

Leaf; pale brown tabby tom with darker patches, long fangs, dark green eyes.

Adder; mottled, dark brown she-cat with a white underbelly, dark green eyes, Leaf's sister.

Jinx; black tortoiseshell loner she-cat with white-and-grey splotches, white paws, has cold green eyes and a missing brother named Swipe.

Lark; black loner with grey markings and many scars, crystal blue eyes, tom, usually has his skull-protector on, Jinx's mate.

Chapter Thirteen

Dreamfeather's POV

It was different, being the leader of a patrol instead of having to trot beside a mentor everywhere you went. I felt much older, not that a day made any difference to my age; maybe "more mature" was the phrase I was looking for.

It was the day after my warrior ceremony and two days after Sparkdust's death. Stormcloud took over her guard duties, while everything else stayed the same.

Behind me, Tigerstripe and Mistnose glanced through the naked trees, probably looking for anything sneaking around our territory as we headed to the StreamClan border. Our paws made crunching noises from the dead leaves that were forming a pretty, frosted collage on the forests' floor. The moon was slowly making its way up the sky, the forest dimming around us, as little dots of light appeared randomly in the endless sea of blue every few heartbeats. The air was becoming colder everyday, especially at night. Leafbare was coming and nothing was going to stop it. As we stopped at the border, I could actually see my breath coming out in puffs of white air.

Together, we silently marked the borders. All was quiet on StreamClan's side. "I hope no one else gets killed. I'm sick of seeing or even hearing about death. It gives me nightmares," *Was that my voice?*

"There will be a few, I'm sure, thanks to Silverstar." Tigerstripe muttered, facing the other Clans territory. My heart sank. I was hoping for a more reassuring reply, but then again, what has ever been reassuring about the life we were living?

I heard Mistnose scoff from the far side of the border. "I can't believe you're against this battle. If we are prepared, RockClan will survive. If they die, that's their own fault!"

Tigerstripe whipped around. Tension filled the still air. "What do you know about the life of a Clan cat?" He snapped, stomping over to the grey she-cat. Their pelts bristled up and Mistnose's ears went flat to her head. "This infection has torn the two Clans apart, even our own Clanmates are turning against each other! They may be on the other side of a border, but we are still the same species. It's not about RockClan surviving, it's about *all of us* surviving this horrid nightmare! For SoulClan's sake, we could be the only remaining cats for all we know!" He was in her face by the end of his sentence, nose to nose.

"I know enough to judge that it should be one Clan working together-" Mistnose began to defend her decision to fight, but the rugged tabby tom stopped her before she kept going. "And how do you and Silverstar plan to go about that? Kill their leader and force them to live on our side? You're all mouse-brained!" His tail lashed side to side while Mistnose slowly lowered herself, as if she were backing down.

There was an awkward silence, one that was so long that Tigerstripe turned around. I heard a purr come from the she-cat once the toms body was facing the other way. "Now, why aren't you telling Silverstar this? If you're so *concerned*, then wouldn't it be in your best interest to complain to the one in charge?" Mistnose retorted, standing up straight again. Tigerstripe stiffened, his ears turning to hear her better, as if he couldn't believe that she was still going on.

While they bickered I stood back, unsure of what I could say or if I should say anything at all. "You won't last, I can assure you that," Tigerstripe snorted and began to pad away, "Just like that mouse-brain, Fireflywing." The tom spat out Fireflywing's name as if it were a foul piece of meat. My eyes opened to the size of two full moons, *Did he really just go there?*

There was a yowl and within the time I could blink, Mistnose was lunging at Tigerstripe with her claws out and front legs extended. They were in a fury of claws and fur, eyes widened to slits. It happened so quickly, I didn't know how to react. I stood there with my jaw dropped to the ground as they tore at each other. Tigerstripe was right, Mistnose didn't stand a chance against a fully

trained warrior. Despite the fact that she had originally latched onto his back, the tom managed to get her to the ground just as quick. She fought underneath him, trying to kick him off and slice his face, but the tom managed to stand his ground. Tigerstripe dodged her hits and matched them with his own powerful blows.

Triumphantly, he backed off with barely any scratches. Only one stood out on his neck, blood beading from the wound. The blood would harden before any could really make its way out. Mistnose rolled onto her side and laid there for a few heartbeats, gasping for breath. Leaves and twigs stuck out from her pelt. Even from a few tail-lengths away, I could see her left eye was swelling up below the stream of blood coming from the wounds he had made on her face.

Tigerstripe padded past me and murmured, "I'm going to guard for the night. Make sure you both get prey, will you?" While in the same spot I was in when they fought, I nodded fast several times, speechless. Finally the battered she-cat stood up and began to trot toward the camp. I could sense her fury from behind her.

"Aren't you going to hunt like Crowflight asked?" I meowed. My voice was almost hushed out of fear that she would lash out. "Do I *look* like I can hunt right now?" She snarled, glaring at me from over her shoulder through her one good eye. Her teeth were clenched and I wondered if it were from anger or pain. Narrowing my eyes at the back of her head, I swallowed down any kind of reply and followed her. *I will come out later with someone else then!*

I prepared to tell the real story to the Clan, as I figured she would exaggerate about the whole ordeal to try to get Tigerstripe in trouble. Mistnose was on a mission to get back to camp and I had to fight to keep up with her. I could already tell she just wanted to see the reaction from them.

Mistnose hopped onto the rocks and entered the camp. Immediately, the Clan gasped. "What happened? Was it StreamClan?" Ripplecurrent asked. She didn't get up to see her; she only wanted to get information. Silverstar sat by her den and waited for the reply. *I bet she wants a reason to go fight them right now...* I gulped.

"It was Tigerstripe! He attacked me and-" There was no way I would let her flat out lie like that! "*Actually*," I started, cutting her off and walking in front of her, "They argued, Tigerstripe brought up Fireflywing, and *Mistnose* attacked *him*." Silverstar's cold glare could be felt from the other side of the clearing.

I swallowed a purr when Lilykit let out a roar, "Wow, he sure beat you, didn't he?" Mistnose's head went down a just a touch as Shadowflower hurried to her side.

Silverstar didn't seem interested in confronting Tigerstripe or calming Mistnose down. "So, why were they arguing?" She asked as she padded up to me, her head tilting to the side. Thankfully, Mistnose was taken into the medicine den before she could bark out the reason. I knew the answer Silverstar was searching for.

"About Fireflywing." I lied, keeping my gaze lifted to look her in the eyes. Silverstar took a heartbeat to look me over, her two different colored eyes narrowed. Eventually, she dipped her head and switched the subject. For a moment, I thought I seen a flash of sympathy and curiosity - something we never experienced anymore - as she mentioned getting fresh-kill. "Mistnose wouldn't hunt because of her injuries, but I will go out again if someone is willing to join me." I answered.

The leader nodded to me and glanced around at the cats sharing tongues in the dark clearing. Blossomfrost licked her lips after eating what looked like a small bird, and then proceeded to clean her kits pelts as they started to drift off. "Come along, little ones," She murmured, nudging them to the nursery. With their eyes half closed, Deerkit and Darkkit raced each other to the den entrance.

"Crowflight, take Hollowpaw out for some training with Dreamfeather. You can hunt in the meantime." Silverstar looked back at me and gave me another nod before padding away. Crowflight stretched and fluffed out his pelt before hurrying to my side. Hollowpaw yawned and trotted up to us, too.

"We haven't had a patrol hunt around the Gathering Place for a while. We could check there." Crowflight meowed and I nodded in agreement. Hollowpaw dragged his paws behind us, but he didn't

complain.

The patrol trotted toward the Gathering Place and as we neared it, I inhaled a whiff of smoke. Before I could panic, Crowflight let out a growl. "Twolegs..." His fur spiked up and he changed directions to stalk toward the bushes that hid their camp. Hollowpaw and I started to follow, but he insisted we stayed put. The deputy disappeared into the bushes.

RockClan had discovered three Twolegs living just behind the Gathering Place. The Clan wasn't sure when they came around but if they hadn't of made any disturbances before, it was unlikely that they would start.

Hollowpaw and I exchanged worried glances as time went by without hearing any reassurance. The cold wind blew in my face, causing my eyes to squint. Both of us started to shiver from sitting still. My teeth started to chatter, but I fought for it to stop. "Maybe we should-" Hollowpaw breathed, a white cloud appearing as he talked, but before he could continue the black deputy appeared again.

We hurried to meet him half way. "What did you see? Did they chase you off?" Hollowpaw asked quietly, his blue eyes as wide as the lake. Crowflight purred, "No, I made sure they didn't see me," The deputy's voice went serious, "I checked out their camp because they were distracted. One is gone, one had meat on the fire, while the other sat on the tree trunk moaning with pain. Normally, Twoleg skin is pink, but the injured one was very pale... I originally thought it was a small injury, but there was blood staining the white wrap... Either way, they aren't a threat. If they were, they would have done something by now. Hopefully they move on..."

I gulped, *Poor Twoleg...* The three of us moved on, in the opposite direction. We spread out and each began sniffing the air for any scent trail. Almost immediately, Hollowpaw picked up on a scent. Crowflight reminded him to stay low and watch for sticks while he closes in on his prey. Ears down, tail straight out, and his belly a bit too far up, he headed into the denser part of the forest. Crowflight braced himself to go after him.

The apprentice stepped on a twig, and startled the squirrel he was preying on. Hollowpaw was determined though. He took off, faster than any apprentice I had ever seen. Crowflight followed a little bit slower, probably to let him have a chance at getting it.

Meanwhile, I parted my jaws to search for the smell of prey. There was an unfamiliar smell coming from the forest, so I followed the meaty smell. *A rabbit?* I wondered, but as I stalked through the pine trees and naked birch trees, I spotted a small mouse chewing away at some seeds. When I got close enough, I wriggled my haunches and pounced. Landing perfectly on its small back, I snapped its neck and thanked SoulClan for giving me prey for our starving Clan.

I headed back to the spot we started at and waited. The mouse was too tempting to leave it in my mouth, so I set it down and focused on the forest Hollowpaw and Crowflight disappeared in. Within heartbeats, Hollowpaw came back out. He carried a squirrel the size of his head with his chest puffed out. "Look, I caught it!" He mumbled through a mouthful of fur. I gave him a nod. "Looks tasty! Our Clan will be thankful. Where's Crowflight?"

He flicked his tail toward the forest and set down his prey beside mine. "He found a sparrow and went after it." The small tom replied, and I nodded. Just as I started to shiver again, the deputy hurried out with a sparrow and a robin. My heart fluttered. *Our Clanmates will be so pleased!*

"Frost is setting in. We will have to bury these in the fresh-kill pile." He informed us, his voice muffled through the feathers.

Just as we began heading back to camp, moaning echoed from behind the Gathering Place. Then there was a huge bang, one that literally rippled through the air. Hollowpaw cowered down, his pelt fluffing out. We froze. Two more bangs came, and then a blood curdling scream echoed around us. "We should go check it out!" I suggested, dropping the mouse as I spoke. I could feel my heart beat speeding up. The deputy shook his head and ushered us away. "Not a chance," He muttered.

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Curled up in my warm nest, I tried to sleep but the warriors den was filled with heated murmurs. The battle was edging closer each day. Even if they had all gone to sleep, I doubted I would be able to drift off with anxious thoughts whirling around in my brain. I gave up trying to sleep and listened to what they were saying; even Crowflight was in on the conversation I realized. Beside me, Snowfern was curled in her own nest, facing the opposite way of the debating warriors. Shadowflower wanted to keep an eye on Mistnose's injuries, so she was still in the medicine den. *One less unnecessary argument*, I thought.

"We can't stay here if Silverstar is actually going to go through with this. This battle is going to kill off cats that don't even want to fight! What are we even fighting *for*?" Stormcloud growled. His brother sighed and took a heartbeat to reply, "I don't know. She tells me if they refuse to join together, she'll take them by force... The infection is driving her crazy." The warriors nodded, agreeing.

Ripplecurrent seemed to disagree, her eyes narrowed and ears flat to her head. "I thought this was ridiculous too, but this is how you survive now. Don't you see that? We have to get more territory, more warriors, more food, and more protection! StreamClan won't last another leafbare with the amount of warriors they have." For once, the strict she-cat's eyes were soft instead of cold. *We have beyond the Gathering Place to hunt, why would StreamClan's territory matter?*

Her mate shook his head, baffled, and scooted away from her. "Out of the entire Clan, I didn't expect you to lose your common-sense too." Stormcloud's voice was filled with disappointment. Ripplecurrent's neck fur bristled up.

Crowflight shook his head, "I think despite what we believe is right, we should follow her orders until we get to StreamClan. After that, you can fight for whoever." Crowflight's head hung low, his eyes tired and shameful. I felt like whimpering. *What has our Clan come to? Look what you've done, SoulClan! This infection has torn us all apart!* I wanted the ground to swallow me whole, never to worry again.

"If this is what RockClan has come to... I don't think I want to be in

this Clan anymore. Maybe this is the end of the two Clans." Stormcloud whispered. Crowflight rested his tail on his brothers shoulder. Even in the dark den, I could see grey hairs appearing on the deputy's muzzle. Stormcloud, too, was getting lighter hairs. "SoulClan would want us to be strong, brother. We will stick together even if we have to leave the territories."

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I was jolted awake by a prod in my side. "Silverstar wants everyone awake," Snowfern meowed. Her green eyes were misty with exhaustion. I didn't know when I fell asleep, but it must have been late because it didn't feel like I had even slept. Without replying, I stood up and arched my back in a long stretch. Snowfern had already made her way out into the clearing by the time I ducked out of the warriors den.

Sitting down beside Snowfern and Tigerstripe, I noticed the moon was still making its way down the sky. I was so tired, I didn't even bother to groom my pelt. After sitting down for a few heartbeats, I began to shiver. As if she read my mind, Snowfern huddled closer to me. "If I don't get moving, I'm going to become ice!" She purred. Behind the humor was worry in her eyes. I nodded, but before I could reply Silverstar began.

"I know it's early, but we need to train as much as possible. Yes, training for everyone." The silver she-cat announced. I felt Snowfern stiffen. "The battle is happening only three sunrises from now. We will be prepared, and we will survive this horrendous outbreak!"

Glancing over my shoulder, I caught a glimpse of Mistnose smirking from outside of the medicine den. Shadowflower's tail fidgeted, looking uneasy. I turned back around before Silverstar could start talking again. "Everyone, eat what you can." She dipped her head and let Crowflight take over. The black tom got up from beside Hollowpaw and stood beside the silver leader.

"I would like to learn to fight as well," It was Shadowflower. She padded up to the group and waited for the leader to reply.

Silverstar was almost thrilled. "Of course! The more the better."